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# POTS AND PANS

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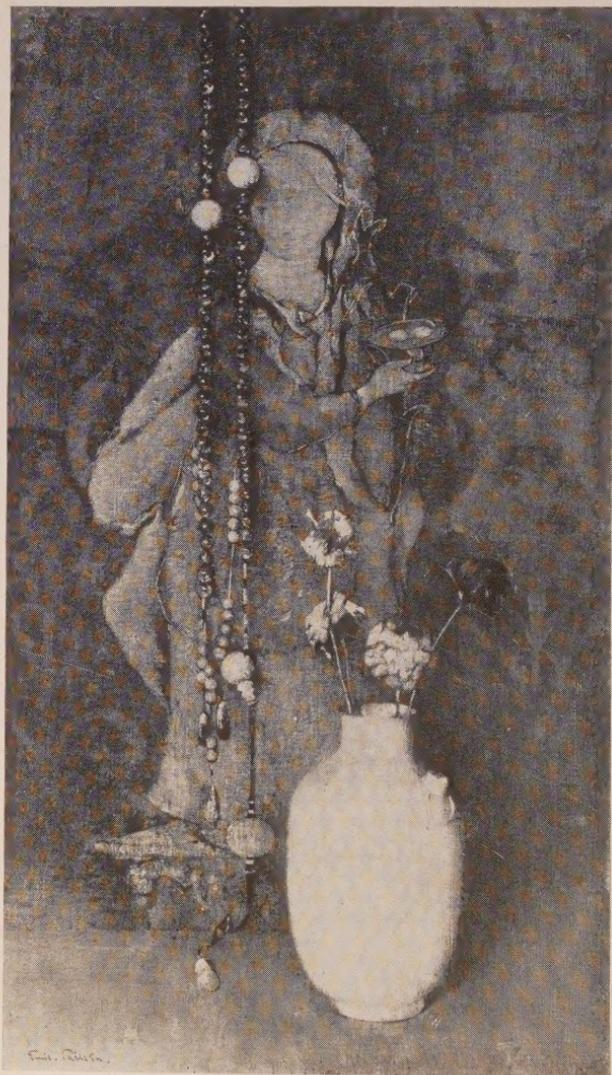
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EMIL CARLSEN, MANDARIN BEADS

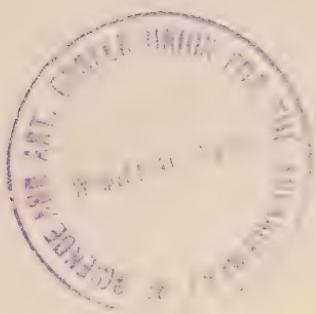
# POTS AND PANS

OR

## STUDIES IN STILL-LIFE PAINTING

BY

ARTHUR EDWIN BYE



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TO  
**EMIL CARLSEN**



## PREFACE

Still-life painting is a field of artistic activity which has been neglected by writers. Countless volumes have been published dealing with art epochs, or the great national schools of painting, religious painting, figure painting, illuminated manuscripts, book illustrations, engraving, etc. There are few books, however, dealing with special problems in painting such as that of landscape. No volume discussing the particular problem of still-life painting, either historically or aesthetically, has, to my knowledge, ever appeared.

It has been my aim to remedy this apparent lack.

Still-life painting is a modest art. The pots and pans, or the fruit and flowers, the humble elements composing a still-life picture, perforce make the painter and his art as modest as themselves. And so, in keeping with the character of my subject, I have endeavored to present, in as simple a way as possible, the charm of still-life painting and its historic development.

The book is intended for lovers of art. Conscious of the fact that neither my title nor my subject will appeal to those who understand nothing of art, I have not endeavored to be popular. Neither have I attempted to

be technical. The readers to whom this book is likely to appeal are those who already have a cultivated appreciation for art and a never-failing interest in it. To those I address myself.

No further preface is necessary. I wish, however, in this place to acknowledge my indebtedness to those who have aided me in my work. To Professor Frank Jewett Mather, Jr., who read my manuscript and offered many valuable suggestions for its improvement, I owe many thanks. His brilliant style as a writer and his keen critical discernment have been a constant inspiration to me, just as the supreme accomplishment of the still-life pictures of Emil Carlsen has given me that conviction of the aesthetic importance of still-life painting which I needed for my work.

To my brother-in-law, Mr. Carel Heldring, I must also express my gratitude. Without his encouragement and sympathy I would have lacked much of the enthusiasm which fortunately I possessed.

I must also acknowledge my appreciation of the assistance furnished by the following persons who courteously lent photographs for reproduction: Messrs. Emil and Dines Carlsen, Mr. Henry Rittenberg, Mr. Hugh Breckenridge, Mr. Robert Macbeth, Mrs. Cornelia B. Sage Quinton.

ARTHUR EDWIN BYE.

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**CHAPTER 1.**

**THE HISTORIC PREJUDICE**



# POTS AND PANS

## CHAPTER 1

The appreciation of still-life painting has grown in recent times with the development of taste and the understanding of the true meaning of art. We must say that it has grown—even though there may appear to have been a period of neglect—for neither art nor its appreciation can stagnate, decay, even for a moment; decay implies death. But in a sense the pursuit of still-life painting is a return, inasmuch as it reached its height in the seventeenth century, with the Dutchmen.

Today the aesthetically cultivated man or woman regards a fine example of *nature morte* with the same pleasure as he would a landscape or a portrait. One is forced to admit, however, that a certain amount of connoisseurship is demanded—unless indeed, one be instinctively gifted—to appreciate a still-life picture to the extent that it might deserve. A Chardin may have painted it; it may be exquisite in tonality, harmonious in design, delicate or rich in coloring, but there lurks half hidden in one's unconsciousness, that a group of mere objects cannot have the claim to one's permanent affection as, for instance, an expansive landscape with at-

mospheric distance and overarching sky, which by its suggestion of cosmic vastness, impels one to philosophic thought, or again, an intimate landscape which, by its poetic associations, leads one to contemplate eternity. One may affirm to oneself, "My knowledge tells me that still-life pictures have equal claims with any other kind to being works of art; my definitions of art tell me so." Why, then, this lurking doubt?

Few persons escape the prejudices of their age, and few can live uninfluenced by the opinions of the crowd. Those who do, however, and there are such, can scarcely be unaware of the attitude of mind which environs them. And so one asks why?

By the average visitor at an exhibition still-life pictures are considered prosaic. The bouquet of flowers seems never so beautiful as a bunch of real flowers which anyone can obtain so easily at the flower shop around the corner. Why paint an imitation of the reality which can be possessed by a tithe of the cost of the picture? The platter of fish seems an actual offense, recalling as it is apt to do, unpleasant sensations of feeling and smell. How can one have such a picture about? The popular prejudice against pictures of fish is well illustrated by a story concerning the former Emperor of Germany. The painter William M. Chase had on exhibition in Berlin one of his remarkable studies of fish. The hanging committee, who well understood the excellences of the picture, were anxious for the Kaiser to examine it. "But I do not like *Fisch*," the monarch exclaimed. "No?" a committeeman responded, "but you must see how well these are painted." "I do not like *Fisch*," the Emperor

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repeated, and in spite of all remonstrances, this was all they could get the Kaiser to say.

If we take another subject, say, the basket of vegetables—what aesthetic suggestions do these create? What has food to do with art? And again—there is that picture of old jugs, pots and pans. Perhaps there is more excuse for that, the doubter will agree, for these old things demand a certain amount of respect we always pay to age, but what enthusiasm, after all, can these arouse?

He is confirmed in his doubts by the scarcity of still-lives he finds in the galleries. There is about one to every hundred portraits, genre subjects, religious or mythological canvases and landscapes. Surely the authorities believed that, comparatively, still-lives are unimportant.

The fact is that fewer still-life pictures are painted. There are few on the market. The art dealers are partly responsible for this. I know of an incident which illustrates the attitude of the art-buying public towards this branch of art. An artist who painted still-life pictures as well as landscapes, but who was most skillful with his still-lives, sent in several of his works to an art dealer for exhibition in his show rooms. The landscapes were kept, but the still-lives were all returned. The art dealer acknowledged the still-lives to be better pictures, technically—even aesthetically—but the landscapes would make a larger appeal.

Those who hold still-life painting in slight esteem have historic arguments to back them, if they know it. There are good reasons, and historical ones, for their attitude. There has always been a school of aesthetics which main-

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tains that art should be sublime, should uplift and enoble humanity. And most art lovers would subscribe to this belief.

Many have been the purposes attributed to art, even insisted upon, for it. That art should have a moral, a religious, or a philosophic purpose, is perhaps the most historic. Art, for all we know, may have been born of the desire upon the part of primitive man to produce or symbolize the image of his god, or to picture his deeds. At the dawn of civilization in Egypt, Chaldea or Assyria art is certainly inseparable from religion. As we rush through the centuries, we find that during the Periclean age of Greece art becomes the chief expression of religious and philosophic thought. Sculpture portrays the dignity and the sublimity of the gods, it ennobles the human form and makes the body the means of expressing transcendental ideas. All other art reflects this type. Even to the decoration of the meanest pot, scenes from the lives of the gods or god-like heroes are portrayed.

It is later in the Hellenistic period that genre subjects are introduced into art—episodes from everyday life, like little children playing with fowl or boys pulling thorns from their feet. Classic art, however, is philosophic or religious in its purpose, as it upholds the god-like ideal of perfection. This classic ideal lingers on in art as long as the Graeco-Roman period lasts, for nearly one thousand years, until the decorative ideal of the Orient and its contempt of form prevails in the sixth century of our era, and when also the northern conquests change, for a time, the entire course of civilization.

But the classical ideal is never extinguished. It

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bursts forth again in the so-called Italian Renaissance and again in the French Revolutionary period, and is alive to this day, with its nobility of form, and sublimity of purpose. The beholder of a painting by any one of the great artists of the Italian Renaissance—Giotto, Masaccio, Fra Angelico, Raphael, or Michelangelo, is transported from the commonplace, the vulgarity of ordinary life, to the serene calm of a higher world. In the sixteenth century Italian art is transplanted to France. Francis I summons to Fontainebleau the best talent he can obtain from Italy—Leonardo, Cellini and others. A century later the brilliant courts of Louis XIV and Louis XV attract artists from all Europe. From this time on France stands at the head of the modern art world aesthetically, and French art thus carries on the torch of classic tradition.

So it is no wonder that the great majority of laymen, and even of critics—those at least uninitiated into the esoteric teachings of painters themselves—hold firmly to the principle that art must conform to the classic standard or ideal of form, and that it have the philosophic quality of sublimity. There are only a few types of picture that can answer such definitions of art. The religious picture comes perhaps foremost; one thinks of Fra Angelico, Bellini, Perugino and Raphael as having made the most universal appeal. Then comes to our minds the purely imaginative picture. By that is meant the glimpse into a world of dreams by which the beholder is transported out of himself for the moment. Sometimes this is romantic in character, as in a Watteau; sometimes mystical as in a Rossetti or a Burne-Jones;

but it is not the real world that is portrayed. Certain kinds of genre, because of their uplifting character, likewise appeal to these persons—pictures of homely incident, chiefly pathetic as in a Greuze or a Hogarth—which are not at all classic in character. They wish life pictured with an emotional stress—some chord of sympathy with suffering humanity must be touched so that the beholder of the picture becomes, temporarily at least, as when listening to a sermon, a better man.

The public is often right. The well-deserved popularity of Millet is easily understood. He pictured peasants with a sympathy perhaps the most intense in art. He was a realist as well as a romanticist, for he painted real life—not for the sake of realism, but for the sake of humanity. He was more than either of these however; he gave his peasants a transcendental reality—a cosmic quality as they worked in their broad fields under the overarching sky. They became patriarchal—archetypes of mankind. Like Michelangelo's prophets they are thoughtful, serious and profound. They seem to sum up the struggles of the human race throughout the ages, so that there is something classical about them. One is, in the end, carried away from the commonplace.

It is no wonder that those who look to Millet, Puvis de Chavannes, Burne-Jones, Watts, as ideal painters, can find little enjoyment in a still-life. They are perfectly consistent as far as they go. But their trouble is that they have formed a narrow definition of art. If they had studied their Dutch masters as well as their Italian and French, their definition would have been broader.

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The prestige of France has for the last two centuries overshadowed the glory that was Holland's. The present active interest in things Dutch is the result of the nineteenth century revival of Dutch art under Israëls, Bosboom, the Maris brothers, Mauve and Jongkind. But it is surprising how little is known—how little written about the art of Holland compared to what is known and written about Italian or French art. If one doubts this, let him look for a history of Dutch art and he will find at best a very inadequate obsolete work. The reliable works are confined to monographs and individual studies. Vermeer, one of the greatest of the world's painters, is a discovery of the last generation. Campin, Gerard David, are resurrections of the modern archivist.

Dutch art has a totally different historical background from the Italian. Here in the north there was no classical tradition with monumental remains to influence the development of a new school. The Gothic statue, the illuminated missal were its sources. Gothic artists, as we now know, derived their types from humanity about them. There was first a realistic phase, then an idealistic, to be succeeded by an emotional. But in the Low Countries, the interest in life about one never forsook the artist. He remained far more independent of tradition than the Italian artist ever was. Dutch art came to its maturity during the Protestant revolt, and at the same time as the rise of patriotism in Holland and Flanders. (These two countries became independent of Spain between 1568 and 1648). Thus it became not the purpose of Dutch art to portray Christian dogma and to teach it to the people, but rather to devote itself to civil and

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individual needs. Flushed with their new-found independence the Dutch tended to be individualistic in their thought. They became intensely interested in themselves, in those around them and in every aspect of life. Hence the group portrait, intended for the adornment of the town hall, the guild, or council chamber. Hence the various types of genre—aristocratic, domestic and peasant; hence also the landscape, the animals and game and the still-life. The democracy of the Dutch people likewise tended to bring art closer to the lives and interests of the average citizen. Art was to be confined no longer to the church or to the palace, but devoted to the home.

Contrary to those who held that ordinary life was too mean for art—that art should occupy itself with god-like things—sublime motives—the Dutch felt that nothing was too mean for art, or, to be more exact, they felt that art could ennoble all life. The subject matter did not count; it was the artist's attitude toward it that mattered, and his ability to penetrate its beauty. Hence developed the theory, essentially modern in the western world, but old to the east, that beauty can be discovered anywhere.

What was the beauty that Brouwer discovered in his dirty cellars filled with howling wretches? Nothing but the low tones, the subtle value of colors, but that was enough. That he was a superb draughtsman who could seize accurately the critical action, and that he was a master of composition adds to the value of his pictures, but their beauty lies chiefly in their tonality.

What was the beauty that Vermeer saw in his quiet and simple interiors? Nothing but the soft light filter-

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ing through casement windows, caressing a woman's arm as she lifts a pearl necklace to her throat, bathing the walls and furniture with a uniform glow that makes his pictures seem, in spite of their simple subject matter, dreams, as mysterious as Giorgione's.

There was no aspect of life that escaped the interest of the Dutch. The religious life was as vital to them as to any race of painters. Rembrandt is to be placed with Raphael and Titian as one of the greatest religious painters in the world of Christian art. They pictured high life as well as low; the cavaliers and satin-gowned ladies interested Terborch and Netscher; the bourgeoisie, Metsu and Jan Steen; the peasants, Brouwer and Ostade. Landscape in and for its own sake was first appreciated by the Dutch; heretofore it had been considered merely as adjunct to a figure composition. In Van Goyen, Ruisdael, Hobbema and Cuyp we have our first real landscape art.

But whether the Dutch painter gave his chief attention to religious themes, to portraiture, to the domestic interior, or to the peasant revel, he was always interested in still-life. If beauty can be discovered anywhere—and they had found it to be so in the simplest cottage, and in the landscape, new ideas at that time—why not in a group of objects on a table? Those copper kettles catching the light from the window—was there not a richness and glow about them? Those amber-colored goblets resting on the red damask cover, with glistening red or white wine catching the sunbeams, and sparkling like jewels in a dark chamber—what a color scheme was that! And there was a chance for arrangement and design in that

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group of Chinese porcelain on the shelf! The artist could play with these things as he could with no other kind of subject.

Not only the Dutch artist loved still-life paintings, but the Dutch people loved them as well. The decorative value of still-life was well understood; the value of color and design apart from subject matter was instinctively appreciated.

After the death of William III of Orange, the political prestige of Holland waned, while at the same time, under Louis XIV the prestige of France rose to its height. This political ascendancy of France, carrying with it national prosperity, was naturally coincident with French influence. To Paris, instead of to Amsterdam the eyes of the art world looked, and for two hundred years the western world fell under the influence of French classicism. Dutch art, it is true, entered France, with Watteau, the Van Loos and others.<sup>1</sup> The Flemish Rubens did much to mould French taste, and Chardin, an isolated figure, was quite Dutch in spirit; yet we must say that Dutch art was sleeping in the eighteenth century.

France has ever since been justly the leader in art. But this has implied that classic ideas of form and design

<sup>1</sup> Van der Meulen, 1643-1690.

Largilli  re, court portraitist. Born in Antwerp, 1650; died in France, 1743.

J. B. van Loo, born in Aix, 1684.

Carle van Loo, born in Aix, 1705.

Watteau, born in Valenciennes (then Flanders), 1684; died, 1721, in France.

Lancret, also born in Valenciennes, 1690; died, 1743, in France.

The brothers Le Nain were French by birth, Dutch by instinct.

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have ruled. It became established that certain rules of order, of symmetry, and spacing must be followed to create a decorative work. Chief of all was the rigid adherence to classical subject matter. Claude Lorrain in his landscapes with classic ruins, Poussin in his "Et Ego in Arcadia," Watteau in his "Embarkation for Cythera," Boucher in his Cupids, David in his "Rape of the Sabines," Ingres in his "La Source," Puvis de Chavannes in his historical-legendary decorations—all adhered in one way or another to classical or academic canons.

We would have expected England, who was the true successor of the Dutch—English art having been born in the Low Countries—to have preserved the Dutch love for still-life—to have appreciated the value of a work of art outside its subject matter. But English art was too strongly influenced by its literature. Art in England has scarcely ever lost a literary flavor. English literature has been overrulingly great. What hope there may have been for a true critical appreciation of art was lost with the Pre-Raphaelites who turned to the Italian primitives for inspiration. Burne-Jones was a mediaevalist. With Watts, Leighton, Poynter and Alma-Tadema English art went right over to pure classicism.

The greatest force to break the bonds of classicism in decoration was the Japanese print. At the end of the nineteenth century Europeans for the first time learned that decoration could be informal, could defy all the canons known to the West—could in a word consist of surprises, and still be decoration. For the first time an

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art, untainted by Greek ideas, held sway over the imaginations of men.

The enormous importation of Chinese and Japanese vases, bronzes, and all sorts of objects did much to add to the interest on the part of the public in oriental art. The inherent decorative value of the meanest utensils was brought home as it never was before. And Japanese and Chinese art taught the western world once again what the Dutch had once taught, but which had been forgotten, the beauty of things in and for themselves, the beauty of pure arrangement and color design, regardless of their story, power to uplift, religious association or what not.

This interest in things in and for themselves is, after all, universal. Nearly everyone has the instinct for collecting. It is inborn in the child who stuffs his pockets full of nick-nacks. Tom Sawyer's chief triumph was not merely that he had made an easy job out of white-washing the fence, but that he had gained by his bargaining, a piece of blue bottle glass, twelve marbles, a glass stopper, a brass door knob, a key, a dog collar and six pieces of orange peel.

The difference however, between an artist and a layman is that the latter is content with the mere possession of a collection while the former glories in their arrangement and coloring. Ming vases, golden bowls, rare porcelain, old armour, tapestries, are of no greater beauty to one who has the artist's soul, whether painter or amateur, than pots and kettles and gaily dyed muslin, if he is allowed to group them in color schemes and line arrangements against the background that he finds ap-

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propriate. He can make the commonest, cheapest objects—provided they are simple and self-respecting, not tawdry—rare and wonderful.

It has been said that beauty can be discovered anywhere, but we can go a step further than this and say that the artist can create beauty anywhere. Not long ago I was invited to a mountain cabin—a rough affair itself, but overlooking a magnificent valley. On the crude table made of logs and boards, the hostess had laid a cover of dyed muslin of an orange color, approaching old rose. On this was a bunch of orange wood-lilies in a golden-hued glazed china pitcher. It was an evident attempt to give a bright note to the sombre wooden interior of the bungalow, so I commented upon its success. "Yes," my hostess replied, "I remembered I had this piece of cloth when I saw along the roadside on my way up here these lilies growing. So I knew I had a splendid color scheme."

To group objects, to arrange them, so as to make patterns of color, is a passion with the artist. Small wonder it is then that we find nearly all painters—whether their main work be portraiture or landscape—doing still-life in their odd moments. Here they are unfettered in their desire to do what they please with things. They have their revenge, in a way, upon nature. The landscape painter, however he may let his imagination play in interpreting the face of nature, is ever baffled. Nature always changes; not two hours together is she the same, and when the artist sets out in the morning to do a misty day, by noon it is clear sunlight that transforms everything. He may endeavor, by means of a

sketch, to record his impression, or his emotions, but then he is forced to rely upon his memory for his finished studio picture.

The portraitist is bound with closer chains than the landscapist. He must be true to his model, and even though he interpret the sitter's character without necessarily adhering to a literal resemblance, there is little play for fancy. Unless he have a Spanish dancer, whom he may pose as he pleases, dress as he pleases—as far as color scheme goes—and play with in a sense, and then with what capricious features—what changes of mood—what fleeting expression has he to contend! The city magnate had better be allowed to flop down in his chair in his own customary way, and look as prosaic as is natural for him, otherwise what the artist paints is not a portrait, but an imaginary head.

But when an artist sets out to do a still-life, here he is the creator, the god who can fashion things as he will. Out of his household goods—or others!—he can select baskets, fish, vegetables, china, vases, bric-a-brac, furniture, antiques of any description, flowers, what he will, as few or as many as he pleases; he can place them where he will, by the sunlit window, or in the shadowy corner of the room, *and there they have to stay*. No passing clouds will alter them, no new day will destroy their first effect; no varying moods can change their face. Only a few still-life subjects are deceptive like a summer day or a maiden's face; flowers will fade, and fish will decay; these are the exceptions we must have as with any rule.

In principle, still-life painting is no different from landscape, portraiture or figure painting. As an art,

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each aims, or should aim, at interpretation, or, in other words, to express in a way that will be understood by others, the vision of beauty and its resultant emotion experienced by the artist. A still-life picture must first of all interpret or express a vision or emotion of the artist. This is one of the tests by which we can judge a good still-life. If it is a mere prosaic imitation in paint of a group of inanimate objects, there is no excuse for its existence. In this respect a still-life demands more than any other kind of picture. A stupid still-life is worse than a stupid landscape, or a stupid portrait, because these latter command an undeserved sympathy from the experience of the beholder; their sentimental associations may render them tolerable. But a still-life must rely upon its own virtues alone.

As Emil Carlsen said to the writer, "There is no essential difference between a still-life and a portrait. Up to a certain point a portrait is a still-life. Then there must be something added—personality, life. But to a still-life there must be also a something added to make it a work of art—call it what you will."

We must seek then, first of all, in our study of still-lives, that inexplicable something which reveals the picture to be an expression of a vision. How the artist may express this may be by color, design, i. e., arrangement or grouping, so we must look for these. He may paint each object with minute care, with almost microscopic detail, as did Gerard Dou, or he may paint them broadly, obscuring details, as if they were seen behind a veil, as sometimes does Carlsen; the method would depend upon the character of the objects painted and the effect de-

sired by the artist. But what is essential is that there be an interesting choice of objects—things that make a jolly company—that they be arranged decoratively, or with design, and that their coloring be especially rich, bright, and varied, or deep, subtle, and mysterious so that it expresses in color a powerful emotion on the part of the painter. In short, besides its conception as a vision or an emotional experience, a still-life, to be worth while, must be technically superior. We might as well admit before going any further that a still-life, more than any other type of picture, must be judged from the point of view of technique. The mere beauty of its paint, the quality of its surface claims our attention. We might overlook defects of this kind in an interior by Josef Israëls where the tender sympathy with human life is the chief aim. But in a still-life slovenly technique is unforgivable. In fact, we might go so far as to regard a still-life as we would any *objet d'art*—a bit of goldsmithy, a jewel, a Japanese sword, an Indian shawl, something to enjoy for the beauty of its workmanship.

Granted that still-life painting is a favorite hobby with the artist the philistine may still be reluctant to give this branch the appreciation that he would to other pictures.

Still-life painting has never been given its due. The religious picture, the classical allegory, the romantic or historical episode, the village tale, have occupied the attention of most artists, art critics, art historians, and the art loving public. They have taken up so much of the space in our art galleries; they have intruded themselves so conspicuously upon the public attention for

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hundreds of years that more humble types of pictures have been forced to take second place.

The average man, therefore, has little chance for appreciating still-life; he accepts, unconsciously, the historic prejudice. If he spontaneously develops a love for it, he is gifted. The fairies have touched his eyes. He has, unawares, discovered that without being a painter himself, he has the artist's vision.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **FORERUNNERS OF STILL-LIFE PAINTING**



## CHAPTER 2

While it may be said that still-life painting originated with the Dutch, it would not be true to say no other school had been interested in it before. As was the case with landscape, it was employed in connection with episodic or descriptive pictures by the Italians, but neither landscape nor groups of inanimate objects were considered fit subjects in themselves for pictures. Whenever intimate scenes of domestic life were portrayed, wherever a painter became interested in describing life about him, we find attention to still-life—even among the primitives. Pietro Lorenzetti (c. 1305-c. 1348) was one of the first Italians and possibly the first among significant masters, to show any interest in mere objects. Byzantine painting had been symbolic, hieratic, aloof from life. But in the Sienese Pietro Lorenzetti we find human feeling, naturalism, and even a touch of the genre. Take, for example, his "Birth of the Virgin," in the Opera del Duomo, Siena. Here we find an intimate scene, perhaps descriptive of a real child-birth, for what we see is a Sienese bed-chamber of the fourteenth century. Undoubtedly the artist was interested in the fur-

niture and the things that stood about the room. He has drawn our attention to the basin in which the infant is about to be washed, the pitcher from which the hot water is being poured, the plaid blanket on the mother's bed and the embroidered towels; but these things are incidental only; the artist's main concern is with the religious episode.

The monumental painters of Italy, inspired by Giotto, and later by Masaccio, were too much occupied with lofty themes to stoop to depicting the commonplace details of everyday life. If we contrast Lorenzetti's "Birth of the Virgin" with Ghirlandaio's version of the same theme in the church of Santa Maria Novella, Florence, it is evident there is no naturalism about the latter. Ghirlandaio shows us an evidently unreal room, idealized in a sense, for it appears palatial, but as a bit of description, impossible. It reminds one of stage scenery; it is unliveable. Only with painters who have descriptive or naturalistic tendencies do we find still-life introduced into their pictures.

Another Italian painting which comes to mind in this connection is also a much later one than Lorenzetti's. I refer to Antonello da Messina's "St. Jerome in his Study" now in the National Gallery. (Antonello c. 1430-c. 1479.) This picture shows much Flemish influence in its color and chiaroscuro as well as in its attention to details of furnishing. Whether the painter had actually been to Flanders or not, and come in touch with the Van Eyck or Van der Weyden school, or whether his Flemish traits are the result of his training in Naples, the Flemish influence is strong, especially in

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this work, painted about 1473.<sup>1</sup> The saint, a small figure, sits in a large Gothic vaulted room. About him are his books and many other articles. The importance of these details makes the picture less a portrait of a saint than an interior of a studio.

This subject, so frequent in art, naturally lends itself to details of still-life. Carpaccio (active 1478-1522) also painted it. He may have been induced to represent it in the descriptive way in which he did by a knowledge of Antonello's work, for we know the latter painter exerted much influence in Venice. However that may be, Carpaccio was fond of describing religious or legendary themes in a natural Venetian setting. His picture of St. Jerome in his study, in the Scuola degli Schiavoni shows us the saint in his well-equipped oratory. What a small part of the picture is devoted to the saint himself! He does not concern us so much as his surroundings. The table, bracketed to the wall on one side is a curiosity in itself. We stop to study its strange construction. On it is a collection of heterogeneous articles, books, inkstands and shells. At the foot of the table, on the dais, rest other books, musical scores (they can be read, so minute is the painting) and loose paper. Around the wall are mouldings, and these are filled with objects—celestial spheres, statuettes, vases—a collection to be envied. Another object of peculiar interest is the elbow chair with its device for holding a canopy over it for state occasions, while attached to it is a reading stand. In fact, the room with its closet adjoining, opened for our inspection, is so full of attractive inter-

<sup>1</sup> Venturi, VII, 4. p. 14.

est that it would take several pages to describe it completely.

Equally descriptive is Carpaccio's "Dream of St. Ursula" painted for the Scuola di Sant'Orsola in Venice (Fig. 1). The picture has been described, with fanciful diversions by Ruskin in his "Fors Clavigera" and better by Ludwig and Molmenti in their monumental work on Carpaccio. This is again a bedroom interior, possibly picturing the chamber of a wealthy Venetian lady of the Quattrocento. It is essentially a pure interior—as near the spirit of Pieter de Hooch as would be possible in Italy—for the little figure in the bed, asleep, with the covers closely drawn about her, only her head with one hand tucked under it appearing, contributes to rather than detracts from the still spaciousness of the room; the apparition stands in the doorway. Therefore the artist has interested himself chiefly in inanimate things—the sombreness and simplicity of the room, with its few elegant and tasteful furnishings, the bed with its high posts and canopy, the covers, the pillow, the elbow chair, the bracket with candlestick, the window sill with roses and plants, the cupboard with books and the table—all these are rendered with a truthfulness to detail, and a love for the things themselves that shows the spirit of a still-life painter.

This, after all, is not pure still-life painting. Yet if we look further among the Italian painters we find still less attention to still-life than with Antonello who was partly Flemish, or with Carpaccio. Perhaps one questions whether Veronese was not interested in a slight degree, in still-life, for we know of his passion for gor-



JACOPO DE'BARBARI, STILL-LIFE  
PINAKOTHEK, MUNICH



CARPACCIO, DREAM OF ST. URSULA  
ACADEMY, VENICE



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geous apparel, velvets, satins, rich stuffs, rugs, golden goblets, costly table furnishings, and all that pertained to a lordly establishment, and which he loved to paint in his great banquet scenes, "The Marriage at Cana" in the Louvre, or "The Feast in the House of Levi" in the Venice Academy. But these things scintillate like jewels in a great setting. One does not think about them in the midst of the pageant as one does in Carpaccio's "St. Jerome."

With Titian we occasionally find associated with a portrait, an interesting attention to realism in details. His "Man with the Glove" in the Louvre is as good an illustration as any. Moroni's "Portrait of a Tailor" in the National Gallery, London, with its prominent shears, is another. But not one of these Venetian portraits shows as much still-life detail as almost any portrait by Holbein.

The first Italian painter to do a real still-life is Jacopo de'Barbari (1450-c. 1516). Barbari was in Nürnberg as early as 1500 where he was an influence upon Albert Dürer. Until 1507 he worked for the Counts of Burgundy, and in 1510 he was in the employ of the Archduchess Margaret. His still-life painting was the result of his northern influence and is entirely Flemish in technique. Hence he is hardly to be reckoned among Italian painters; he was out of the main current of Italian ideas, and his talent was insignificant. One of his pictures, formerly in the Augsburg picture gallery, now in Munich, was painted in 1504 (Fig. 2). It represents a strange combination. Hanging from a hook on a wall, and held together by a violin bow, are a pair of gauntlets

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and a partridge. This is one of the earliest still-life pictures extant. That there are two other still-lives by him, one in Regensburg and one in the Layard Collection, Venice, indicates his proclivity for this type of picture.

Later in the sixteenth century we find the influence of the north affecting the art of Italy to a greater extent than before. With Caravaggio (Michelangelo Amerighi, 1569-1609) and the Italian naturalists, we find a growing interest in still-life. A picture of Caravaggio's in the Hermitage at Petrograd (until 1914) called "The Lute Player," is chiefly attractive for its still-life details. The figure merits no attention, but the charmingly conscientious way in which the violin and the bow, the open page of music, the vase of flowers and the fruit, are done, indicates that the artist was more concerned with these things, as are we, than in the subject. Moreover these objects are grouped so that they make practically a complete picture in themselves.

Caravaggio gained his reputation early in life as a painter of fruit and flowers. His adherence to realistic detail, his lack of idealism, and love for genre caused him to be regarded by the Italians with the greatest contempt—a proof that his art was not Italian. Nevertheless he was imitated by his Italian contemporaries, and the grandiose Annibale Carracci stooped to paint a "Bean Eater"<sup>2</sup> in the spirit of Ostade. Akin as he was to the north, Caravaggio exerted considerable influence on Lastman, and through the latter, on Rembrandt.

Capuccino (Bernardo Strozzi 1581-1644) was purely

<sup>2</sup> Now in the Colonna Gallery, Rome.

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Dutch in many of his genre pictures. The one entitled "The Cook" in the Brignole-Sale collection, Genoa, is strongly reminiscent of Pieter Aertz. Here we have a kitchen interior, with a caldron, boiling over an open fire. The cook is consciously busy plucking a goose, while about her are hanging, or lying over the table, on the floor and on the hearth, turkeys, ducks and other game. Conspicuous in the foreground is an enormous pitcher. The painting is obviously a study of game, much as a Dutchman would have done it.

One other late Italian painter was influenced by the Dutch school, Michelangelo Cerquozzi (1602-1660). He was chiefly famous, in his lifetime, for battle scenes, but he also painted realistic genre subjects. Late in his career he took to painting fruit and flower pictures, and today these are the works for which he is most highly esteemed.

The brevity of this list is a clear indication that still-life painting was not appreciated in Italy. In only one field of art, a minor one, were still-life subjects ever popular. The decoration of cabinets, pulpits, *cassone* or marriage chests by means of intarsia, or wood mosaic, began as early as the fifteenth century. At first the designs were elaborate, with landscapes and figures, but later it became the style, particularly for cabinets, to represent shelves filled with articles of every kind—books, vases of flowers, utensils, etc. It was purely a decorative craft, yet so accomplished that the Italian intarsia work became famous throughout Europe.

We have wandered far from the representative artists of the Italian school, when Italian painting was at its

height, and because the later men were beyond doubt reflections of the north—they come too late to have affected the art we are studying—they cannot be counted in the development of still-life painting.

Hence it is to the north we must look for the source of this development. We find it with the earliest painters of Flanders, Jan van Eyck and Robert Campin, contemporaries. We do not know the date of the birth of the former, but Jan van Eyck was working on the Ghent altarpiece from 1426 to 1432, a recognized master; it is believed he was born between 1380 and 1390. Robert Campin settled in Tournai about 1406, at the age of twenty-eight, hence he must have been born about 1378. We cannot determine which was the first to show an interest in still-life, but the point is of little moment, as undoubtedly interest in genre, in the intimacies of domestic life, was an inheritance of mediaeval art in the Low Countries. The illustrated calendars with the seasons of the year, the breviaries and Books of Hours convince us of this.

The picture of Jan van Eyck which we may take as an example is his so-called Arnolfini panel in the National Gallery (Fig 3). Here we have a Flemish interior, with every minute detail. Jan Arnolfini—it may be Jan van Eyck himself as Rooses suggests—stands in the center of the room holding his bride by the hand, with just pride and unconscious dignity proclaiming her condition as an expectant mother. But in spite of the care with which every detail of their apparel is rendered—the artist's evident love for the texture of velvet and fur is noticeable—the eye wanders from these. The sur-



PETERUS CHRISTUS  
LEGEND OF ST. ELIGIUS



JAN VAN EYCK  
JOHN ARNOLFINI AND HIS WIFE  
NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON



roundings of the figures hold our attention longest, the bed, its curtains, the casement window, the mirror on the wall with its reflections, the chandelier, the slippers on the floor, the little spaniel—these things are an important part of the picture.

Jan van Eyck, however, was not the genre painter that we find in the master of Tournai. He represents the hieratic in primitive Flemish painting. True, in portraiture he was more of a realist, and was not the mystic that his brother Hubert seems to have been, but his religious pictures breathe an aristocratic aloofness from life; his madonnas are princesses of heaven, with diadems, thrones, and worshipping attendants. They are not domestic, nor bourgeois, nor are they surrounded with the things of real life. Robert Campin's madonnas are on the other hand comfortable wives of city magistrates. They are mothers—truly Flemish. Campin leads the Tournai tradition, followed by Roger van der Weyden; Bouts and van der Goes, in giving the thoroughly national stamp to Flemish art. He ushers in the genre treatment of religious themes. As one of the greatest of the primitives Robert Campin deserves more attention than he has yet received; his artistic personality must have exerted a tremendous influence in shaping the development of northern painting.

Let us take his representative "Madonna of the Mousetrap"—the famous Mérode altarpiece in Brussels. The center panel pictures the Annunciation. Mary is a splendid housewife. Her house has the peculiarly neat and clean appearance we would expect. A rather large and heavy woman, she is seated comfortably

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on a stool at the foot of a carved wooden bench, in front of a fireplace. She is absorbed in reading a book when the angel appears. But she takes absolutely no notice of him. Practically minded, she has, apparently, no use for supernatural visitors. We are not interested, any more than she, in this part of the picture. Far more curious is the room and its details—the beamed ceiling, the casement window, the sculptured alcove, the fireplace with its screen and andirons, the carved seat, the table with its vase of flowers and its open book. All these things are arranged in an admirable way, although of course not grouped by themselves. The shutters of the triptych increase the genre character of the altarpiece. On one side is Joseph in his shop, fashioning a mouse-trap. On his table are all his tools. In the window, in view of the street, is a second mousetrap, completed, while the interior of the shop is as minutely rendered; even the wood shavings and the bits of wire can be seen. Surely this is prophetic of what we may expect in the way of still-life painting later on in the Low Countries! The other shutter pictures the donors of the triptych, in an interior no less characteristic of the artist.

This masterpiece, so thoroughly original, so absolutely Flemish in character, gives Campin a unique place among the primitives. Only recently identified, he has not yet been assigned his true place in the history of art. Although endowed with nothing like the imagination of the van Eycks, he must nevertheless rank with them as one of the forces which produced and gave distinct character to Flemish art.

Other pictures attributed to him, the van Werle altar-

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piece in the Prado, Madrid, in particular, show a similar feeling for the genre with still-life that we found in the "Madonna of the Mousetrap." But for all that we do not find in Campin a painter of pure still-life.

Petrus Christus, a pupil of the van Eycks, marks another step in the development that gradually leads to absolute still-life painting. His "Legend of St. Eligius" in a private collection in America<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 4), represents his interest in objects of goldsmith art. The saint, who is a goldsmith, is seated before his bench. There are so many things about him that we instinctively turn from the story to examine the objects in the room. Undoubtedly the artist was as much engaged with these as with the figures. In front of him are his scales, weights, and other things, among them noticeably one of those circular convex mirrors, popular with the van Eyck as well as with the Campin studio. But behind the Saint is a regular collection of curiosities. On a shelf are vases and flasks, while hanging below are necklaces, pendants, purses and the stock in trade of the goldsmith.

After Petrus we will have to wait for Quentin Matsys for any further development in still-life. Roger van der Weyden, a great painter who gave minute attention to detail, merely carried on the Campin tradition as far as still-life painting is concerned. Memling, his successor, was a reaction to Gothic mysticism, while Gerard David and Hugo van der Goes stuck to the episodes they had to tell. Dirk Bouts, from Holland, loved to paint repasts. His "Last Supper" in Louvain, his "Pass-

<sup>3</sup> Formerly in the Oppenheim collection—Paris.

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over" in Munich, or his "Christ in the House of Simon the Pharisee" in Berlin, gave him splendid opportunities for table settings, but he woefully failed in his groupings. All we find in them is a continued interest in objects, but neither he nor any of the other painters of his school was able to divorce still-life from the religious episode.

Quentin Matsys (about 1466-1530) was not able to do so either, but he was a pure genre painter in certain pictures, and in these he gave his still-life objects a predominant place. Matsys' "Banker and his Wife" in the Louvre (Fig. 5) goes a step further than Petrus Christus' "St. Eligius." Our first interest, it is true, is with the figures—the intentness with which the banker weighs out his money and with which his wife watches him; but we linger longer over the accoutrements of the room. On the table—the obvious base for still-life—are scattered various articles, the familiar reflecting mirror, an open book, etc., but at the back are two shelves of well grouped objects which forecast the arrangements of Teniers the younger. Well lighted, holding their place in the shadow, they are more naturally painted than any grouping of objects we have yet discovered in our search. In the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam, there is a still-life painting which is attributed by Dr. Max Friedländer to Quentin Matsys. It is undoubtedly of the Flemish school in the time of Quentin Matsys. In the shape of a lunette, perhaps a fragment of a larger picture, it is nevertheless an independent composition. On a shelf are a number of books; this is all there is to the picture, but the coloring in golden browns, with the



JOACHIM DE BEUCKELAER, MARKET SCENE  
QUENTIN MATSYS  
BANKER AND HIS WIFE  
LOUVRE, PARIS



books of various hues of yellow and rose, deeply luminous, shows that in the mind of the master no objects were too mean for his attention.

In the Mauritzhuis, The Hague, there is another small primitive still-life, likewise attributed to the Flemish school of this period. Entitled "Vanitas," it represents a human skull on a window ledge. Behind, out of the window, there is a brownish landscape with ruins; on a carton, below the skull, is the inscription "Memento Mori." This is one of the earliest still-lives extant with the familiar skull. Later, as we shall see, the Spanish still-life painters were fond of such subjects.

Matsys, with his introduction of realistic genre into art, purely for the sake of picturing contemporary life, paves the way for a host of successors. Martin, or Marinus van Roymerswael, called also the Zeelander (c. 1497-c. 1567) showed an increasing interest in still-life groupings. One of his several "Money Changers," that in the National Gallery, London, shows us two old men, with avaricious, miserly faces, seated before a table on which are their account books and piles of money. These latter, we notice, are especially well lighted; but behind, on a chest, are a crowd of objects, boxes, papers, books, candlesticks and vases. Another picture of van Roymerswael's is a "St. Jerome" in Madrid. Here the old man is packed in, literally wedged, among his furnishings, his books and tables. The saint himself points out to us the skull upon which he is supposed to meditate. Here we have the beginning of those increasingly popular groupings—a table with skull, books and candlestick—the scholar's study-table.

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Whenever one sees still-lives with these objects, one thinks of St. Jerome, who during the process of still-life development, was weeded out of his environment.

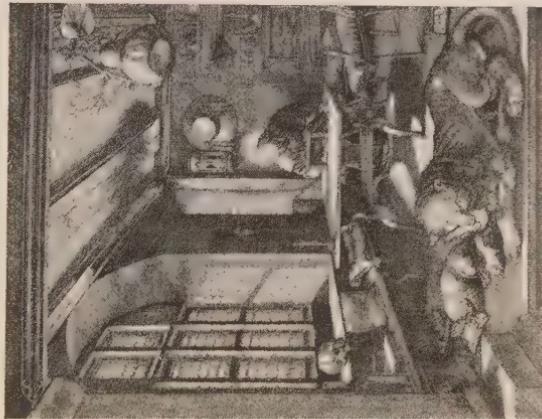
Jan Sanders van Hemissen (about 1504-1555) was a follower of van Roymerswael. While the last named was born in the north, in what is now the Netherlands, van Hemissen, born near Antwerp, died in Haarlem. From this time on most of the painters who introduce still-life into their pictures belong to Holland. Van Hemissen's contribution may be understood from his "Calling of St. Matthew" in Munich. The scene takes place in the interior of a Dutch or Flemish room. Obviously the subject gave the painter a chance to do another variant of Roymerswael's "Money Changers." Consequently we see here a tableful of money, with pens, inkstand and the various articles pertaining to the business. Behind on the wall are again shelves of books.

But with Pieter Aertz a tremendous jump is made. He goes right after still-life, down to the kitchen or into the dining room; while he introduces a figure by way of excuse, it is evident that with him the objects of interest are not mere adjuncts to a figure subject.

Pieter Aertz or Lange Pier (1507 or 1508-1575) was born in Amsterdam. He worked as a young man from 1526 to 1536 in Antwerp which was then the metropolis of art, but he must be considered a Dutchman and one of the most influential in directing Dutch art on the current which it followed. His two "Cooks" in Brussels are his most characteristic works. In each of these we have a robust female, busy with her work. In one case she has a cabbage under her arm, in another, she holds a spit



ALBERT DÜRER  
MELANCHOLIA



ALBERT DÜRER  
ST. JEROME IN HIS STUDY



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with chickens ready for their roasting. On a table in the latter picture lie carrots and a basket full of vegetables, while behind on another table is an earthen bowl. In these we have a new kind of still-life, thoroughly original.

In his "Kitchen," in Copenhagen, Pieter Aertz goes further. The figures now are placed in the background. They are pure pretexts for a still-life picture. It is as if the painter felt that a picture of meat and vegetables was not sufficient without people cooking or eating them. In the foreground is a huge table, filled with every article of food possible to include in one composition, game, fowl, hams, meats, fish, vegetables and fruits. It is not difficult for us to understand the attraction of such subjects for the painter. The combination of freshly sliced hams, cabbages, cucumbers and cheese offers a richness of coloring every painter would delight in. A picture like this, however, like the kitchen and market scenes, is open to the criticism of being coarse, or at least *de mauvais goût*. The art of Jacob Jordaens would demand the same criticism, but this raises a point of aesthetics which I prefer to leave for a later chapter. These pictures of Pieter Aertz are thoroughly Dutch versions of the abundanza theme. He was a painter of the people and of their interests; his best known work, "The Egg Dance," in Amsterdam, illustrates the joyful side of peasant life, their feasting and their revels. To paint their kitchens and market stalls is but to go one step further.

Joachim de Beukelaer, Aertz' pupil (1533?-1573) (Fig. 6), was unable to keep the kitchen out of his religious themes. Or did he choose religious subjects which

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obviously gave him the chance to bring the kitchen in? Probably the latter is true. Taking a hint from Aertz' "Jesus with Martha and Mary," where Martha comes in with a basket full of game—why so many rabbits and fowl for one repast, we ask—de Beukelaer painted a "Prodigal Son,"<sup>4</sup> where the feast is being prepared. This is nothing but the interior of a prosperous Flemish household, one of those seemingly impossible interiors where reception hall, dining room, pantry and kitchen are combined. On one side we see the cook with her roast and spit, on the other the mistress, elegantly attired, busy preparing other dishes for the feast.

In his "Game Dealer" in Vienna, de Beukelaer casts pretexts to the winds and deliberately paints for its own sake what interested him most—game and food.

Pieter Breughel (1535-1569) is the most famous of the Dutch and Flemish painters of the people with their faults and foibles. He was beyond all else a painter of humanity; what interest he had in still-life was subsidiary to his theme, but in several of his pictures he introduced some definite still-life groups. His "Village Wedding" in the Vienna Imperial Museum may be taken as an example. The picture is crowded with feasters, the bagpipes giving the scene a truly festive air. But all these are means which the painter used to fill his canvas with varied, luxuriant and glaring color, for these Flemish festive scenes are mere pretexts for splendid coloring; not least conspicuous in the "Flemish Wedding" are the yellow omelettes. But food is not the only

<sup>4</sup> In Antwerp. Beukelaer likewise did a "Jesus with Martha and Mary" in Aertz' style. This picture is in Amsterdam.

kind of still-life we find in this picture. In the lower left hand corner is a table, off by itself, covered with bottles and jugs. One might call it an independent group, such as Teniers loved to paint a half century later.

The Flemish school, finally influenced so strongly, and to its detriment, by the late Italian, did not succeed in freeing still-life entirely from its environment. This was left to the Dutch. The way was paved by Pieter Aertz who came the nearest to painting pure still-life of any of the primitives, unless, indeed, Quentin Matsys painted them, so that later when Dutch nationality and Dutch independence was able to express itself, there was no difficulty in breaking the fetters. But before coming to the Dutch and later Flemish painters, we must notice what development was going on in Germany.

As has been said, Jacopo de'Barbari was the first Italian to paint a pure still-life, and his picture in Augsburg (1504) appears to be one of the earliest of its kind in any school or country. This picture was painted under German or Flemish influence. But what German still-life painting preceded him? Martin Schöngauer was the first great name in German art; his name is linked with Michael Wohlgemuth's and Barbari's as an influence upon Albert Dürer.

A mere glance at some of Schöngauer's pictures reveals that he belonged to the Campin-van der Weyden succession. Further analysis of his art only deepens this conviction. His "Holy Family" in Vienna is so much like a Campin or early van der Weyden in spirit and

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treatment as to seem like a Tournai school piece. In this picture, in one corner, is a basket of grapes, so conscientiously, so exquisitely done, that we feel at once the artist's interest in details of still-life. It is not put in as a necessary part of the picture, but for its own sake.

Primitive German painting being a provincial reflection of the Flemish school, we would expect to find genre and still-life elements entering into German religious pictures and portraits as it did in Flanders.

Albert Dürer (1471-1528) was a genius who gave German art an original stamp. As an engraver he interests us most.

The art of engraving, not lending itself to monumentality so readily as that of painting, is able to express itself better in subjects of a trivial nature, the perfection of the execution being the chief aim of the artist. Engraving, too, is a process by which many copies of a work can be made, and used for illustrations of books. Nürnberg, where Dürer worked, was a great centre for engraving. Hence Dürer was able to turn to such subjects as coats-of-arms, book plates, and line drawings of all sorts, such as studies of rabbits, praying hands, etc. These engravings he made into masterpieces by their decorative design, superb draughtsmanship, richness in light and shade and delicate execution.

Dürer's engravings which show the importance he attached to still-life are: "St. Jerome in his Study" (Fig. 7), "Melancholia" (Fig. 8), and "Portrait of Erasmus," 1526. Others come near to being in the category of still-



HANS HOLBEIN  
THE TWO AMBASSADORS  
NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON



HANS HOLBEIN  
PORTRAIT OF GEORGE GHISZE  
Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin



## FORERUNNERS OF STILL-LIFE PAINTING

lives, like "Reeds," in the Vienna Albertina, "The Rabbit," and the "Hands" already mentioned.

Whether Dürer actually did any still-life studies or not, undoubtedly the attention he drew to simple things did much to educate taste and to make it understood that a work of art could consist as much in the rendering of a rabbit as in the portraying of a mythological episode. In fact his plate of the shield with a death's head has far more value to us today than his large Raphael-esque "Holy Trinity." Dürer was much honored in the Low Countries as well as in Italy, and influenced at least one Dutch painter—Lucas van Leyden.

That Hans Holbein, the younger, (1497-1543) was a true successor of Quentin Matsys, in one respect at least, is shown in his portrait of George Ghisze in the Berlin Museum (Fig. 9). The merchant is seated in a room full of objects, in this case rather conspicuously important. On two sets of shelves at his back, and on a table, are a quantity of objects, rendered in the manner of the Antwerp master, or of van Roymerswael. Other pictures of Holbein which show a similar interest are: "The Two Ambassadors" in the London National Gallery (Fig. 10), "Portrait of Erasmus" in the Louvre and "Archbishop Warham."

Undoubtedly there was much pure still-life painting done in Germany, of which we have no extant examples; probably such pictures were considered no more important than sign-boards. What art the religious wars which racked the empire permitted to flourish, fell under the sway of Italy, and German art died out.



## **CHAPTER 3**

**DUTCH AND FLEMISH STILL-LIFE PAINTING**



## CHAPTER 3

### I

#### POTS AND PANS

We have seen that still-life painting began in the kitchen. Quentin Matsys and van Roymerswael, with their genre subjects, paved the way for Pieter Aertz, who with his cooks and kitchen scenes took for granted that the preparation of bounteous repasts must be the most interesting thing in life—to a painter at least! Undoubtedly with the Dutch and Flemish the kitchen was one of the most popular themes in art, and for a good reason; the kitchen was an important department of the household. It was dignified in a way we today in other countries can hardly understand. How else are we to account for those surprising interiors which are pictured to us by sixteenth and seventeenth century artists? The mistress, in her costly garments, with lace at her elbows and fur on her coat, sits at a table piled with uncooked food, while close by is the cook in her apron preparing a roast. The lord and master stands looking on with interest—even guests appear to be entertained by the pre-

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parations, and with all the richness of the carved furniture, the tiled floor, the pictures on the wall and the vista through the doorways, we are at a loss to determine whether this is the kitchen, the reception hall, or the one and only room in the house!

In a farmhouse this would be understood, but what we see is the home of a wealthy citizen. We are therefore forced to conclude that the kitchen was no mean room in the household. This view is borne out when one visits an ancient country house in the Netherlands. One would be content today to use these kitchens for state occasions, with their tiling and beaming, their spaciousness, and their cheerfulness. The hearth with its appurtenances, its pots and its pans hanging on the wall, or standing on the shelves; these are things not only of utility, but of beauty. To this day the Dutch housewife is as proud of her brass kettles as of her tableware.

In the well-to-do home of today, the kitchen is of course not the place for the family to gather. They have moved up one step into the dining room. There may be libraries and halls, but still there are associations with the dining room that renders it the coziest place to live in. In many homes the dining room is still the living room, and the richer its appointments, the more delightful is it as a place in which to converse and in which to sup a cup of tea with the host and hostess. I myself was surprised when I first visited a beautifully appointed home in the Netherlands, to find myself being received in the dining room where the hostess was busy with her embroidery, and the daughters likewise, long before the servants prepared the table for the meal.

## DUTCH AND FLEMISH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

This modern custom in real Dutch homes to use the dining room as a living room, is a reflection of the past glory of the kitchen. So it is not strange that the genre painters loved to picture kitchen scenes. We can thus dispose of any prejudice at the start which leads one to hold such motives in disdain. When we look at these pictures, let us forget our modern kitchens—the disdain should be for our own households.

We cannot, however, hold for a moment the idea that the painters were attracted to the kitchen and to the pantry merely by the food. Granted that the Dutch and Flemish were, or seemed to be, a trifle gourmandish, we need not suppose that they were much more so than any other northern people. The point is that the Dutchman or the Fleming did not look upon the material things of life as too mean for their attention; instead they dignified their kitchens by their presence. And they had come instinctively to feel that the things of the pantry and of the hearth were as beautiful in themselves as the objects of a landscape.

Henry W. Ranger said, referring to Rembrandt's painting "The Butcher":<sup>1</sup> "In looking at that picture, one sees nothing of blood and death, but is charmed by the beauty of color and the general exquisiteness of the painting. I can now see the wonderful reds and golden greys in the leg of beef hanging on the hook in the butcher's stall. The effect helps us to realize that we are surrounded by beauty if we can but distinguish it.

<sup>1</sup>"Art Talks with Ranger," Bell. This picture is in the Louvre. A similar version is in the Johnson Collection, Philadelphia.

#### POTS AND PANS

In this instance we see clearly that it was not an attempt to accent ugliness."

This is the answer to the popular criticism that painters like Brouwer and Jordaens sought uncouth motives. But they sought motives for art in departments of life that were unknown to other schools. There was no more refined painter than Brouwer and if we fail to find the pleasure in groups of pots and pans that Teniers found, perhaps the fault lies in ourselves.

David Tenier, the Younger, (1610-1690) went further than any other of the genre masters we have so far met with, except Pieter Aertz, in painting groups of pure still-life. We may begin with him, especially because he belongs to an artistic succession which links him up with those we noticed in the last chapter. His father, David Teniers, the Elder, (1582-1649) was a genre painter who, like his sons, pictured village scenes, while his grandfather Julian was likewise a genre painter. His father-in-law was Velvet Breughel.

Teniers the Younger, is most generally known for his "Kermesses" with peasants dancing or amusing themselves before quaint rustic taverns. He also did peasant interiors. And in both kinds of pictures he painted still-life arrangements. Let us take his "Interior of an Inn" in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence (Fig. 11). The picture is divided into two distinct halves. On one side is the butcher with his chopper, talking to the cook who is cutting up some meat. On the other side is by far the most important part of the picture. In fact this is a complete picture in itself, which could be cut off from the rest, leaving us two perfectly unified compositions in



DAVID TENIERS THE YOUNGER  
DETAIL, FROM "INTERIOR OF AN INN"  
UFFIZI GALLERY, FLORENCE



DAVID TENIERS THE YOUNGER  
DETAIL, FROM "INTERIOR OF A FARMHOUSE"  
NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON



## DUTCH AND FLEMISH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

place of one. Here we have a whole beef cut open and hung from a cross beam of the roof. Below, grouped about a large barrel is a tipped-up plate from which are falling onions, leeks and lettuce heads. On a rough stool are other vegetables, while on the floor are large heads of cabbage, some bowls, a basket and various cooking utensils. Needless to say, such a variety teems with color; the color is obviously the main charm, for the painter has placed his luscious green cabbages next to the beef with its many hues of red-pink, salmon and purple. The pottery adds the ochre tones, the barrels and the stool and the dark background of the walls give the more sombre greys and browns. But the coloring is not less delightful than the lighting. That Teniers has arranged his meat, vegetables, and utensils with more attention to the play of light and shadow upon them is evident from the fact that the brightest notes are concentrated on the upper half of the beef while most of the objects are in shadow. Here is the proof that meat and vegetables are painted not because the painter was drawn by material associations to portray them, not because these things suggest good meals to come, but because of the opportunity they afford the painter to revel in color and light. Otherwise why does he place some objects in a shadow? If all he wanted to do was to display his wares, to excite our appetites, this would be a poor advertisement indeed. There is a similar picture in the Metropolitan Museum, attributed to David Teniers the Elder.

The above "Interior" is indeed a revel of color, and one must admit a bit flagrant. Far more tasteful are

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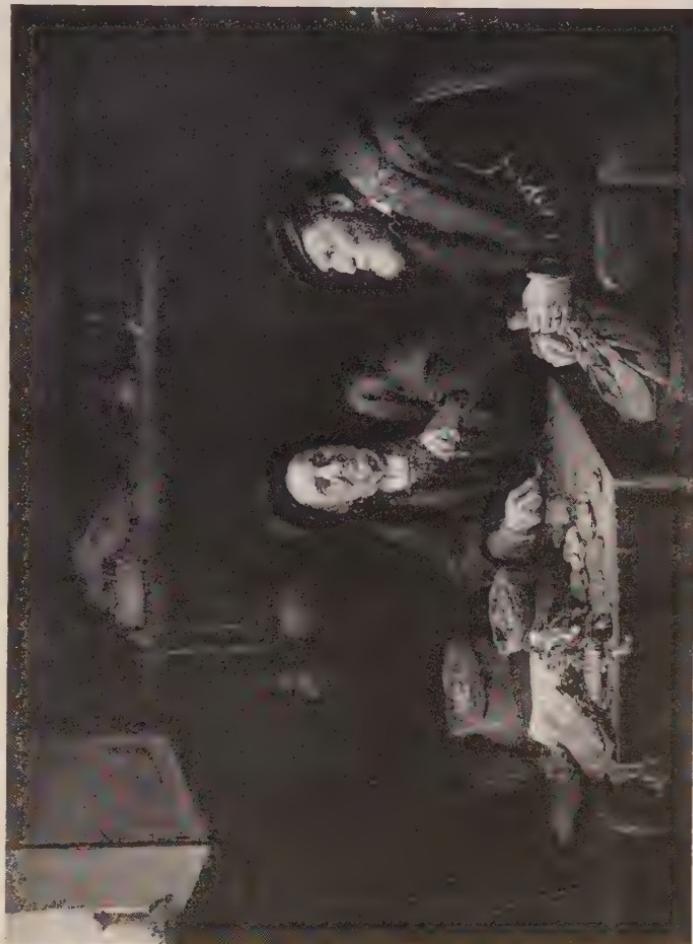
other arrangements of Teniers. We may take his “*Interior of a Farmhouse*” in the National Gallery in London (Fig. 12). A peasant woman peeling pears is introduced by way of an excuse. There are three separate parts to this picture; on one side is a perfect still-life group consisting of a half-barrel section turned upside down, with a white towel and a kettle on it, a large pot, a jug, a wooden block, a flask, one or two other receptacles, two cauliflowers, and a collection of pears. Overhead, on a cross-beam, hangs a bit of cloth, while on top of a rough plastered oven lies an old coat and a battered hat. These few objects, high above, set off in agreeable contrast the larger group below. As a group, this is one of Teniers’ best; there is restraint in the number of objects presented, not so many as to bewilder one; there are enough open spaces to give a sense of rest, and a naturalism, in spite of their evident arrangement, which is most engaging.

Another of Teniers’ pictures is similar to the last; I refer to his farmhouse or tavern “*Interior*” in Buckingham Palace (Fig. 13). The collection is again arranged in front of a rough wall with great posts filled in with brick and plaster and the familiar oven. It is another of those pictures where the still-life constitutes an independent composition so that the other part of the canvas could be cut away without any detriment to this. There are more objects here—two of which Teniers was very fond of introducing, a wheelbarrow full of vegetables, and a long-necked flask with a piece of paper or a turnip-top for a cork. This flask with its interesting cork



DAVID TENIERS THE YOUNGER  
DETAIL FROM "INTERIOR OF A FARMHOUSE"  
BUCKINGHAM PALACE, LONDON





DAVID TENIERS THE YOUNGER, THE MISERS  
NATIONAL GALLERY, LONDON



might almost serve as a signature for Teniers; it occurs so often and is so characteristically obvious.

Pictures like these are illustrations of the freedom of fancy the painter may indulge in. He can make any arrangement he pleases that will give him the chance for painting light and color. Here is an old hat with a feather in it, on top of a barrel, two cheeses on a stool, and everywhere about pots and pans, baskets of fruit and vegetables, of every size and in great confusion, melons, artichokes, cucumbers, turnips and many others. But notice the unity evolved from the apparent chaos. The group assumes a pyramidal form, while the dark and simple background of the wall gives the proper contrast and balance. I know of no more successful arrangement of a complicated group than this. Not only is it harmonious with the proper balance of restful spaces against concentrated masses, but there is variety in the shapes of the things. There is not an inch of monotony on the canvas.

It is worth while dwelling at this length upon Teniers, as in these groupings by him we see the prototypes for much of the still-life painting that has been done since. The brass kettle, turned on its side so that its polished, dented interior can catch the light; the white cloth thrown casually over the table; the wine flask behind the kettle; the vegetables placed together nearby; these are the familiar objects which strike us in the still-life of today, and which come down to us from Teniers.

When we think of Teniers, we think also of Adrian Brouwer. The latter was older than Teniers by four years, and died at the early age of thirty-two, hence

chronologically we should speak of him first. Moreover it is evident that Teniers drew much inspiration from him. But Brouwer's still-life groups are seldom the independent arrangements that Teniers' were. We do not feel like cutting them out of their canvases to make separate pictures, as we do with Teniers.'

Brouwer was a greater painter. He is an even better example of the painter who could create beauty where it would be least expected. In his disreputable cellars, where the vilest wretches of the country are drinking, gambling and brawling, what motive could there be for artistic expression? The answer is, the light. The most wonderful grey tonality pervades his pictures. They are bathed in a mysterious haze which, though dark, vibrates. Brower knew so well the vibrant quality of light that his figures, as well as every object around them, move and seem to live. We anticipate that his still-life groups would sparkle with light and color, and they do. Take, for example, "The Brawl" in Dresden, and we see the upturned half of a barrel, used for a table, over which is thrown a cloth, and beside it, a jug and a saucer.

"Four Peasants Fighting" in Munich has characteristic groups of still-life—rough benches, baskets for seats, old towels, jugs, bottles and broomsticks. Obvious still-life groups are to be found, likewise, in the "Room in the Village Baths" in Munich, and "Gambling Peasants" in Munich. In fact almost any picture by Brouwer contains still-life groupings.

David Ryckaert III (1612-1661), was a pupil of Teniers who did exactly the same thing in the way of



GERARD DOU, THE ALCHEMIST  
FORMER HERMITAGE COLLECTION, PETERSBURG



GERARD DOU, THE HOUSEMAID  
BUCKINGHAM PALACE, LONDON



still-lives—introducing them into interiors where they make separate pictures. His “Peasant Interior”<sup>2</sup> in Dresden, might be compared to Teniers’ “Interior” just mentioned. The figures are small, obscurely placed in a dark corner. The main picture consists of a collection of barrels, churns, vegetables, pots and pans, well lighted and rich in coloring—the polished surfaces of the metal pots being the strongest note—but they are not nearly so well grouped. One in the Metropolitan Museum is a splendid example—an interior with still-life predominating. There are deep brown shadows but withal a silvery light and especially rich coloring to the pots and pans.

Another painter who loved mere pots and pans was Gerard Dou (1613-1675). Dou is a striking contrast to Brouwer who brushed in his compositions with a spontaneity and easy freedom that was marvelous. Dou is conspicuous for his painstaking minuteness of detail. He was, to all intents and purposes, a miniature painter, but, unlike most painters of detail, he keeps everything in its place; a pupil of Rembrandt, he never lost sight of the value of light and atmosphere as an envelopment for his figures and objects.

One of his pictures, “The Housemaid,” in Buckingham Palace, London (Fig. 15), shows us a housemaid leaning against a window frame, polishing a kettle. In the window hangs a bird cage—as dear to Dou as a corkless bottle was to Teniers—and on the sill is a pewter pitcher and a ladle. The simplicity with which these few objects are grouped, the exquisiteness of

<sup>2</sup> The Dresden Gallery possesses two still-lives by him.

their execution, make this little picture as charming as any of Dou's works. Godfried Schalcken painted a variation of this composition. His "Woman Scouring Pans" in the National Gallery is very like Dou's. More conspicuous for its still-life is Dou's "Grocery Shop" in Buckingham Palace (Fig. 17). In spite of the figures, this is obviously a *tour de force* in still-life painting. This is its fault—its interest is divided—even multiplied. Fortunately this kind of thing was not indulged in by many painters. We have Dou's favorite composition—a view through a window frame, with the marvelously executed bas relief of *putti*, playing with a goat, at the base—a perfect imitation of stone. On the window frame again, are Dou's bird cages. But inside! What an encumbrance of wares! Granted the perfection with which every plate, piece of fruit, jar or bucket is painted, the picture is unsatisfactory. Our eyes wander from the disturbing chaos—there is no grouping—no centre of interest—no rest.

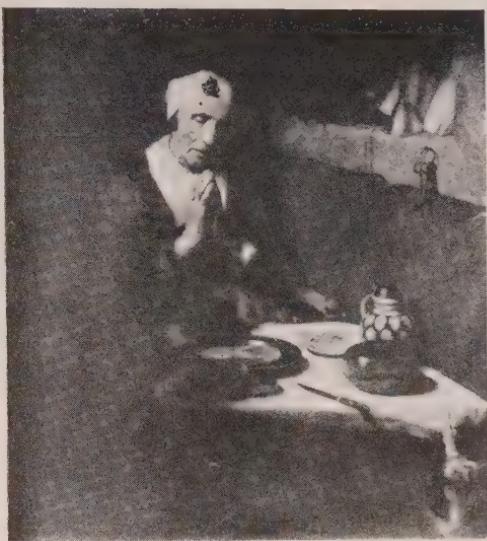
This, then, is an example of what still-life painting should never aim to be—mere imitation. Perfect imitation of objects this is indeed!

Better is his "The Alchemist," in the Hermitage collection, Petrograd (Fig. 16). It reminds one of a "St. Jerome in his Study." On the broad window sill, like a table, are placed a great open book—a candlestick, of course—a mortar and pestle—a basin—a sphere, and a few papers. Behind, on a reading desk, are more books and the usual human skull, while the very centre of interest—the point to the picture, is the flask of liquid



GERARD DOU, THE GROCERY SHOP  
BUCKINGHAM PALACE, LONDON





NICHOLAS MAES, GRACE BEFORE MEAT  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM



## DUTCH AND FLEMISH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

which the alchemist holds up to the light and to the admiring gaze of the spectator. There is imitation here to be sure, but more beside. There is arrangement, atmosphere, light and concentration.

One of Dou's best known pictures is "The Young Mother" in the Mauritshuis, The Hague. It is an interior—one of the uncertain kind where living room merges into pantry. The spaciousness, the elegance of most of the furniture, the heraldry in the casement seem to indicate it is a drawing room; but the group of still-life, in the foreground, at one side, seem to belie this appearance, for here we have a table with a grouse or quail, and a cabbage upon it, a broomstick leaning against it and a basket, a pot, a lantern, a kettle, and a bunch of carrots at its feet. Hanging upon the wall is a hare. The arrangement might have been taken out of a Teniers. We wonder if the broomstick was the identical one upon which alone Gerard Dou is said to have worked for days!

There were a number of painters of the Amsterdam school who, following Pieter Aertz and Rembrandt, loved to paint pictures of pots and pans, jugs, utensils of various kinds, and articles of food, using figure subjects which gave them the opportunity they desired. Nicolas Maes (1632-1693) was one of these. Two of his pictures are worth studying. His "Grace Before Meat" in the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam (Fig. 18), shows us an old woman, with head bowed, eyes closed and hands clasped, seated before a table on which her simple meal is placed. The tablecloth catches the full light so that the objects stand out upon it with greater distinctness than

## POTS AND PANS

anything else in the picture save the hands and face. The cat in one corner serves to accentuate the interest in the still-life on the table. And how thankful we are for the relief those objects bring us! The hot glow of the shadow, the deep red of the woman's costume, the general yellowish tone over the whole, needs the cool blues of the pottery, the silver greys of the metal, the whites and creams of the plates and tablecloth.

"The Good for Nothing Servant" in the National Gallery, London, is of similar genre, for, in spite of the importance of the figures in the picture, our attention is definitely drawn to the still-life. The story which the picture tells is that of broken pots.

Metsu (1629-1667) was another who contributed to the style. He used in many cases, the same compositions as Dou with the window frame. He painted Breakfast Scenes, Herring Sellers, and Fish Girls, in all of which pictures still-life is important, though not paramount to the human interest.

Such pictures as these exerted great influence upon succeeding generations of still-life painters, who did similar things. Even the art of the superb Chardin reflected Maes, Metsu and the Dutch painters of familiar genre.

Any number of painters continued to do genre with still-life in Holland, until the last days of the decline. To illustrate how long the style lasted, we need to refer only to Willem van Mieris (1662-1747) (Fig. 20) and to his son Franz van Mieris the Younger (1689-1763) two of the last masters of the Dutch school to preserve the national tradition. Willem's "Market Stall" in the

WILLEM VAN MIERIS, A MARKET STALL,  
Fitzwilliam Collection, Cambridge



GERARD TERBORCH, PATERNAL ADVICE  
Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin





## DUTCH AND FLEMISH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

Fitzwilliam Collection, Cambridge, has the kettles, the game birds, the basket of fish, and the fruit dear to these painters. Franz the Younger did apothecary and grocery shops in the style of Dou and Metsu.

## II

### TROPHIES OF THE HUNT

As we have seen, it was the kitchen and the pantry which first drew the attention of the Dutch and Flemish painters to still-life. Here the painters first saw the beauty of mere pots and pans, common vegetables and articles of food. Their eyes once opened to these things, it was but natural that finally some painter should arise bold enough to tear the still-life from its setting and claim for his gorgeous compositions independence as works of art.

It has been the custom for writers to take for granted that still-life painting began with the sign-board. One will find in almost any discussion of the subject such statements as these, "De Heem, who was the first still-life painter, probably was merely a sign painter." Very likely he did paint sign-boards. But his dates are 1570-1632. Jacopo de' Barbari, the Germanized Italian, painted a fine still-life in 1504, and Quentin Matsys of Antwerp was probably painting old books and skulls quite as early. The error probably arose from the fact that old Dutch sign-boards were particularly artistic. We know it was customary for inns, taverns, game dealers' and tradesmen's shops to have attractively painted signs advertising the nature of their business. These

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signs often presented complete pictures. Nothing could be more appropriate for an inn than to have a sign picturing some luscious article of food. "The Red Herring Inn" would have a well-rendered herring on its sign. "The White Rabbit" would have a sign illustrative of its name and so would "The Stag," "The Pheasant" and "The Cock." Accustomed as the public must have been to these signs, it would have been perfectly logical to regard an exceptionally well painted one as a work of art. Certainly it was not beneath the dignity of the painter to eke out his livelihood in this way—just as Roger van der Weyden and the Flemish Court painters blazoned shields. We might entertain the thought that many a still-life painter began his career by painting signs, and that we know was the case with Chardin.

Whatever influence sign-boards may have had in accustoming the public to view still-lives as individual pictures, we cannot regard them as forerunners or prototypes of still-life painting. The historic development through the genre too clearly tells us that the process was a gradual emancipation.

There was one particular kind of still-life subject which freed itself earlier than the rest. It was a dead partridge that Barbari painted in 1504. Possibly dead game had more obvious claims to beauty than raw beef and carrots. Even the most initiated must admit that the plumage of pheasants or the fur of hinds is easier to admire than dripping flesh. It taxes our aesthetic appreciation a bit less.

Undoubtedly painters felt for a long time as many do today that there was an objection upon the part of



FRANZ SNYDERS, DEAD GAME  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM



the public to witness the things of the kitchen framed by themselves, and hanging on their walls. But there could be less objection to a string of partridges.

Perhaps this was one of the reasons which led Franz Snyders (1579-1657) to devote entire compositions to dead game. But undoubtedly he was also led to do so by his success as an animal painter in collaboration with Rubens.

Snyders was a pupil of Pieter Breughel the Younger, which connects him with his primitive forerunners, but he was far more influenced by his contact with Rubens. In Rubens' "Faun" in the Schoenborn collection, and in "The Progress of Silenus," at Berlin, Snyders painted the fruit, while in Rubens' "Diana Returning from the Chase" in the Dresden Gallery, he is responsible for the game and the hounds. This collaboration helped Snyders to attain a mellowness of tone, a luminosity of color and a freedom of style for which Rubens was noted.

One can hardly conceive of greater richness than Snyders attains in some of his still-lives. This is gained not so much by his elaborate arrangements—a great number of objects often being introduced—as by his coloring. The shimmer of the fur of his animals, the lustre of the plumage of his birds would naturally contribute to richness, but few painters were able to paint fur and feathers with the delicate iridescence of Snyders. There is but one fault in his pictures—one that still-life painters often make—they are often too crowded—like Teniers' "Interior" with the beef—too suggestive of voluptuous living.

This criticism applies best to his pictures of fruit. These we will refer to merely in passing, as van Huysum far excelled him in this type of picture. One in the Copenhagen Museum is a magnificent assemblage of all kinds of fruit, large and small, in baskets and bowls, and is better than most in arrangement. About as bad an example of still-life as one could conceive is his "Fruit Stall" in the Hermitage, Petrograd, where the still-life is scattered pell-mell over the canvas. Scarcely less chaotic and riotous is his "Fruit and Monkey" in London. Snyders frequently introduced a monkey or ape in his pictures, establishing an example popularly followed hereafter in the Netherlands down to the time of Allébé. Such pictures must be placed in the same category as Hondekoeter's; as pictures of live animals.

Snyders' pictures are of varying quality, for sometimes, as in his large canvas in the Mauritshuis, The Hague, he shows neither luminosity, fine coloring nor unity, but a really fine example of his art is to be seen in his "Wild Game" in the Ryks Museum at Amsterdam. There are two of these pictures in the same museum. I refer to the one with a large roe, hanging by a leg, with its head resting on a table (Fig. 21). On the table also are a boar's head and a boiled lobster, and nearby is a basket of fruit and a vase of flowers. The composition is especially forceful, with the interest concentrated upon the handsome animal, wonderfully executed. Here, too, is mastery of color, a combination of boldness with subtlety, the red of the lobster, the brightness of the fruit and flowers contrasting well with the delicacy of the animal's fur.



FRANZ SNYDERS, DEAD GAME  
XVIII<sup>th</sup> CENTURY GALLERIES, LONDON





JAN FYT, PARTRIDGES AND WOODCOCKS  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK



## DUTCH AND FLEMISH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

Less successful is Snyders' "Larder" in the Munich Pinakothek. The unity of the group is spoiled by the introduction of the figure. Though there is too much in the picture, Snyders is here again supreme in his mastery of textures.

A painter who understood pure still-life painting much better than Snyders was Jan Fyt (1611-1661). As a pupil of the former he was able to profit by the excellences as well as by the mistakes of Snyders. He seldom errs by overcrowding. He discovered that, if the beauty which attracts one in dead game consists in the richness of their coloring and the soft texture of their fur and feathers, then the painter must insist upon these things and these alone.

Fyt therefore is the best still-life painter we have as yet come across. His picture of "Dead Game" in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 23) is a perfect expression of this type. He shows a collection of but seven game birds—products, perhaps, of a day's hunt—partridges and woodcocks—thrown upon the ground. The background is a relief, in the sense of being quiet and neutral although very rich and deep in coloring, although low in key, a large straw basket alone serving to offset the plumage of the birds. There is no bold contrast of color; the painter confines himself to the tones and colors of the feathers; it is a study of the variegation of color sparkling against rich indigo tones. There are two other good Fyts in this Museum, a "Dead Hare" with woodcocks, and "Dead Partridges" at the foot of an old tree.

Jan Fyt in his later career developed a very bold and dramatic style in his treatment of animals. Generally

such pictures are combinations of live and dead animals, as in "The Eagle's Repast" in the Antwerp Museum, and "Deer and Hares" in Berlin. Fyt also did still-lives with fish, fruit and foliage superbly rich; but he is most characteristic in his dead game, and there is no better example of this type than the one first mentioned, that in the Metropolitan Museum.

Fyt had, like all great masters, pupils and imitators. Adriaen van Utrecht (Antwerp 1599-1652) although an older man, and a painter of various kinds of still-life, was undoubtedly influenced in his later pictures by Snyders and Fyt. A picture of his, in this country, may be seen in the Wilstach Collection, Philadelphia. All these painters are best known by their paintings of dead game. Pieter Boel (1622-1674) was possibly a pupil of Snyders as well as of Fyt. He painted live animals, hunting scenes, and also still-lives of dead game. He, in turn, was the master of the Antwerp painter, David de Coninck (1636-1699) who continued the style of Snyders and Fyt, painting hunting scenes and dead game with exceptionally fine coloring and good design.

In Holland, at this time, a different style of dead game painting was being produced.

Jan Weenix (Amsterdam 1640-1719) with his father Jan Baptist Weenix (1621-1660) (Fig. 24) developed a type of still-life which for decorative effect surpassed anything that had been done, and when one looks at their pictures today, one can hardly conceive of any arrangements more sumptuous than these.

Jan Weenix, the son, was the most brilliant of the two, so we will take a few examples of his art as illustra-



JAN BAPTISTE WEENICX, A TROPHY OF THE HUNT  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM





DIRK VAN VLIET, DEAD GAME



JAN WEENIX, A DEAD HARE  
ALTE PINAKOTHEK, MÜNICH



tions. His picture in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich (Fig. 25), represents a large dead hare, hung up by a leg to the branch of a grape vine, its head resting on the ground. On one side is a turkey, on the other a few small game birds and some fruit. These objects all appear to be in a garden, for in the distance we see tall, well-trimmed cedars, a flight of stone steps with a balustrade, with figures, and a distant view of garden terraces and fountains.

His picture in the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam, is similar. Here we have a large dead hare, with other game, thrown upon the ground, beside a large urn, behind which is a view of a park and a castle (Fig 27).

The famous Weenix in the Mauritshuis, The Hague, "The Dead Swan," again pictures a garden scene. In this case, beside the urn are thrown a magnificent white swan and a deer.<sup>3</sup>

These three pictures, like others of his, are as far removed from the plebeian kitchen type as the lord of a manor from one of his peasant tenants. For this is aristocratic still-life. The nobleman or country gentleman has returned from the hunt; by his garden steps he has thrown his trophies, even his gun, and leaves to us the pleasant contemplation of gorgeously plumaged swans, carved urns, balustrades, marble terraces and gardens. These decorations were, in fact, designed for princely halls, and the largest collection of Weenix's paintings belonged to the Kurfürst Johann Wilhelm of Düsseldorf at Schloss Bensberg. What a glimpse we catch of the elegance of country life! What suggestiveness of human

<sup>3</sup> A variant of this is in the Wilstach Collection, Philadelphia.

## POTS AND PANS

associations with these things! And, leaving the landscape out of consideration, how decorative is the arrangement, how rich the coloring!

There is genius displayed in Weenix's compositions, for it would have been easy for him to divide the interest in his picture. But our attention never wavers between the landscape and the game. The distant view, like the background of a Parthenon metope, gives space and rest, and brings the main objects out in relief. There is always one thing upon which the light is concentrated—the dead bird or the dead hare, and on these is lavished the painter's skill—as great as Jan Fyt's—in rendering textures and subtleties of coloring, whether it be the iridescence of turkey feathers, the velvety sheen of rabbit skins, or the soft whiteness of swan plumage. But he excels Fyt in luminosity. Always brilliant, highly keyed, his pictures seem lit from within, radiating gold and amber.

Weenix's pictures meet nearly every test we would demand of good still-life painting—or of any good painting for that matter. They make that appeal to our imagination which convinces us that the artist conceived a vision of beauty, that he experienced a profound emotion, which he has been able to interpret in turn to us. By means of his arrangements he has impressed us with the force and unity of his original conception; by the skill of his execution he has permanently charmed us, as in a musical composition, there is force and volume, contrasted with quietness and low tones, never the same repetition.

If one wishes to appreciate more fully the qualities of



JAN WEE NICX, DEAD GAME  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM



a Weenicx, let him compare one of those I have described with a Valkenburg (Fig. 26). Dirk Valkenburg (1675-1721) was an imitator of Jan Weenicx. He also pictured trophies of the chase thrown by the terrace steps. Like Weenicx, he was employed by princely patrons, notably by Prince Lichtenstein, in Vienna, and by William III of Holland. There is an example of his works in the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam, entitled "Wild Game." In spite of the richness of his arrangements, and his wealth of detail, how lacking they are in force and impressiveness! These are the works of a borrowed talent, of a man whose inspiration was the mere reflection of a master's. We are lost in his detail, beautiful as it is; there is that lack of concentration, that failure to say one thing, that spoils any work of art.

Weenicx was the last word in this type of Dutch still-life painting. With him, unless we include Melchior d'Hondekoeter among the painters of trophies of the hunt, culminated the movement started by Pieter Aertz in Holland to paint dead animals, whether in the kitchen or out of it. Weenicx takes us out of the kitchen and the larder, into the chateau courtyard, and with him we almost approach the French spirit of decorative treatment.

Weenicx had another and more famous pupil, his nephew, Melchior d'Hondekoeter (Utrecht 1636-Amsterdam 1695) (Fig. 28). Melchior d'Hondekoeter! What a vision of wealth and splendor his name spreads before us! He was not a still-life painter, and yet, he was. This paradox is explained by the fact that his reputation rests upon his pictures of live birds and wild fowl,

## POTS AND PANS

while at the same time he did dead game and still-lives for which he is not well known. The trouble is that the word still-life or “nature morte” is a much abused term. But it is only a step from the art of Weenicx to that of his famous pupil. Both excelled in large, decorative compositions, designed for palaces and patrician homes —Hondekoeter decorated “*Het Loo*” for William III—and what small difference is there between a “Dead Swan” by a castle terrace, and a “Floating Feather” in some garden pool?

The charm of Hondekoeter’s paintings consists of many things. In decorative design they are magnificent—even magical—in coloring they are rich, glowing, brilliant beyond words; in imaginative appeal they are unequalled; there is a subtle enchantment about his strange and foreign birds in lordly parks which suggests oriental romance. When we see his peacocks and his owls—unearthly, mysterious birds—we expect to see some Arabian prince or Chinese princess in the scene, or we imagine some picture like Hondekoeter’s where they would appear. But there is still another quality in Hondekoeter’s pictures which makes them admired today as they were always admired, a quality which is peculiarly Dutch. We call this quality purely pictorial. This can best be explained by comparing a picture of Hondekoeter with an animal picture by Landseer. As far as skill is concerned—in rendering life—texture of fur or hair, the English master is as clever as the Dutchman. But Landseer’s pictures sicken us today—like Greuze’s—with their sentimentality. The Englishman is telling us a story, pointing out a moral; his art is not so much



MELCHIOR D'HONDEKOETER,  
EAGLES ATTACKING FOWL  
LOUVRE, PARIS



## DUTCH AND FLEMISH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

that of painting as of sermonizing. "A Distinguished Member of the Humane Society!" None of that for Hondekoeter. The Dutchman is a painter above all.

As Hondekoeter's masterpieces are not still-lives, we will refer only to his less well-known paintings, which are. The Ryks Museum, Amsterdam, possesses one called "Dead Birds." In the background are architectural ruins which give the picture the same decorative quality as some of Weenix's. There is another in the same museum, of dead game, with a dead hare, and birds, a gun and other hunting implements; and there is here, too, another one, in the style of Otto Marseus van Schrieck, with plants, toadstools, birds and insects, all at the base of a tree trunk. The National Gallery of London possesses a similar painting. In Brunswick there is a still-life with fish. In Dresden, another with hunting-pieces. The Schwerin Gallery has a painting of dead poultry. These are sufficient examples to show Hondekoeter as a painter of real still-life, and a versatile one at that.

The popularity of Hondekoeter never died. He was imitated in each succeeding period of Dutch art. Aert Schouman whose life spanned nearly the whole eighteenth century (1710-1792) imitated the master's style in his day, and in the nineteenth century the versatile Maria Vos revived it.

One other name must be mentioned before closing this brief account of the painters of fur and feathers—that of Cornelius Lelienbergh, of The Hague (flourished 1646- after 1672). Most of the painters just mentioned were chiefly interested in the decorative effect of

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their pictures, but Lelienbergh, more like Fyt than any of the rest, devoted himself to the simple beauty of plumage. The Ryks Museum of Amsterdam possesses four of his works; they are all still-lives with dead birds—a dead parrot, or snipe, or chickens. A very charming example is in the Wilstach Collection in Philadelphia, and it should be noted in passing that this small collection is, for its size, exceedingly rich in Dutch still-lives, having examples by Peter Claesz, Weenix, Snyders, Adriaan van Utrecht, Hondekoeter, Fyt (these last two rather poor, however) and Abraham van Beyeren. The picture by Lelienbergh, dated 1654, shows a dead pigeon hanging by a windowsill, while nearby are lying several dead finches. The delicacy with which these little birds are painted cannot be described, but the chief beauty of the picture consists in its fine luminosity. The colors are soft, yet rich, with olive and amber tones predominating. It is one of the finest pictures in the Wilstach Collection. Lelienbergh was not alone in loving to paint the smaller feather-folk; Fonk—although not well-known—has left us some extraordinary refined still-lives, and this tradition was continued in the eighteenth century by a school of painters in Dordrecht.

## III

### FRUIT AND FLOWERS

Flower painting, strictly speaking, can hardly be called still-life painting. Even though we use the French translation of the term, *nature morte*, we are using a misnomer for flower painting. For flowers ought cer-

## DUTCH AND FLEMISH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

tainly to be alive as the painter studies them, and they ought to look alive in the picture, and as for being "still," let anyone try to paint a vase of poppies and he will see the petals droop and fall, one by one, before the picture is half finished.

But fruit is certainly still-life (the term is a bad one in any sense) whether it be *nature morte* or not, and fruit is so frequently combined with flowers in pictures that one can scarcely omit pictures of this kind from a study of still-life painting.

Of the many kinds of still-life pictures fruit and flower pieces have always been the most popular. They appeal to the greatest number of people. There are some persons, sensitive to associations, who, against their better judgment cannot overcome their prejudice to raw beef; there are others who, while admiring the plumage of birds and the fur of animals, prefer them alive to dead; there are others, again, who cannot perceive the aesthetic qualities of pots and pans. But who ever objects to fruit and flowers?

It takes less effort perhaps to enjoy a picture of luscious fruit, oranges half peeled, displaying their juicy insides, or of a vase of flowers—white roses and jasmine for example—than it does to enjoy a picture of pots and pans, but it also takes less of an effort to paint them. That is, to make a likeable picture of them. I recall a story told of a modern American landscape painter. He was a painter of prosaic scenes; he loved empty fields with deserted barns against a leaden sky, but with these he produced some of the most poetic landscapes in American art. Asked one time why he did not use more ro-

## POTS AND PANS

mantic subjects, or choose scenes more obviously picturesque, he replied, "Do you mean why don't I paint villages churches with their spires peering above the trees and lonely little cottages nestled in their shade? Any damned fool can make pictures like that!"

To find beauty in the commonplace requires a more piercing eye, a keener appreciation of what beauty is. A bouquet of flowers is obviously beautiful, a bowl of fruit scarcely less so. But we can have real flowers, infinitely more lovely than painted ones, any time we wish, upon our table or on our shelves, while bowls of real fruit are as easily obtained. Here is a problem that faces the fruit and flower painter and makes it extraordinarily difficult for him to make a really distinguished picture.

The artistic value of fruit and flower still-lives has nothing whatever to do with the intrinsic qualities of these things. Nothing is more stupid than a painted imitation of a bouquet—and there are so many of them on the market, in our homes and museums. But the merit of a still-life with flowers consists in an interpretation of them—in an arrangement of line, mass and color, the same interpretation that must be made of any still-life group, so that artistically there is no difference whatever between a good flower piece and a good canvas of pots and pans. The painter of fruit and flowers has therefore to beware, lest the beholder exclaim, "I would rather have the originals—the fruit to behold and to eat, and the flowers to smell!"

After all, the painter of fruit and flowers cannot confine himself to these mere things. He is forced to place



JAN DE HEEM, STILL-LIFE  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK



them against a background, and on a support—they cannot hang in empty space. What is that background going to be? This is often a more difficult problem than the choice of subject. He must also select his combination; if he chooses roses, what sort of fruit would go well with them; is his scheme to be one of brilliant contrast, or one of harmonious tones in one key; in other words, what is to be his range? These are questions which the still-life painter must consider, and which involve him in complications which the average beholder never takes into account.

The best still-life pictures are not casual copies—however natural they may appear—but the result of careful study on the part of the artist.

Daniel Seghers of Antwerp (1590-1661) was the first notable painter of flowers in the Low Countries. He had predecessors, among them being his master Jan Breughel or "Velvet" Breughel, son of the famous Pieter, who, however, did not begin flower painting until 1608, and Ambrosius Bosschaert (Antwerp circa 1565—The Hague 1621). Breughel's garlands were smooth and hard and stiff; Seghers' flowers were fresh, glistening, delicate in texture, more life-like. Bosschaert's were more in the primitive style of Breughel. A picture of his in The Hague Museum shows a bouquet of flowers in a window; behind it a landscape. The effect is like glass or enamel.

Breughel and Seghers were led to flower painting by surrounding their portrait medallions of saints and madonnas with garlands. It is interesting to notice how this branch of still-life painting, like still-lives of kitchen

things, began by being subservient to a figure subject. An example of his art in the Antwerp Museum, is entitled "St. Ignatius," where the saint, in a tiny medallion, is lost behind the gigantic frame of flowers.

The garlands and festoons of Seghers were doubtless derived from Italian art. Garlands of fruit as well as of flowers were favorite decorations of Mantegna and Carlo Crivelli. They were used as early as the primitive Antonio da Negroponte; but these painters in turn found such motives in Florentine sculpture and in the antique; hence the origin of flower and fruit garlands must be sought in classic art.

Seghers, like most of the Antwerp painters who were influenced too much for their good by Italian art, fell into bad taste. When ornament crowds a picture, the result is vulgar, like too much jewelry on an ugly woman. Seghers, however, paved the way for a host of flower painters greater than himself.

He had pupils who followed his style, like the German Elliger, but it is to Holland we must look for the origin of real flower painting.

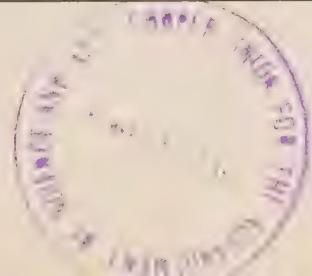
Jan Davidszoon de Heem (1606-1684) was both Flemish and Dutch, as he was born in Utrecht, worked there half his life, but died in Antwerp. His father, David de Heem (1570-1632) was a fruit and flower painter of Utrecht to whom has been given the credit by some writers on Dutch painting, on what authority is not stated, of being the father of still-life painting. Apparently it was not known that Ambrosius Bosschaert was working in Utrecht as early as 1616, and Jacob Vosmaer of Delft (his dates are 1584-1641) at about the



PIETER DERINGH, STILL-LIFE WITH FRUIT  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM



JAN DAVIDSZOON DE HEEM, STILL-LIFE  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK





same time. If David de Heem were the father of anything, it was of the de Heem style, practised by a whole dynasty of de Heems. His son Jan was the greatest of the family, for he was one of the rare men in the Dutch and Flemish school to understand the spirit of still-life painting. Like Weenix of whom we have spoken, and van Huysum and Kalf of whom we shall speak later, he was a magician who could create a world of enchantment out of his materials. In his hands porcelain bowls, golden dishes, plates, oranges, grapes, apples, flowers of all kinds, beset by flies and beetles, became like a setting of jewels, bright, dazzling, lustrous, rich and wonderful. This was his aim, to bring together, to arrange, compose and illuminate objects which were pleasing in themselves, attractive to the senses and stimulating to the imagination; but his magic touch, his perfect technique, combined with his good taste, made them richer and more beautiful than a setting of crown jewels could be. One example of his work hangs in the Dresden Museum. On a table rests an upturned bowl filled and overflowing with fruit—grapes, half-peeled oranges, apples and cherries, while from above dangle temptingly more grapes with their rich green leaves. This is a more tasteful arrangement than many of his still-lives. In spite of its numerous details, the lighting and interest are concentrated on the overturned bowl. But the same tasteful arrangement cannot be claimed for the example in the Metropolitan Museum, New York<sup>4</sup> (Fig. 29). This latter picture technically is a masterpiece. It repre-

<sup>4</sup> Assigned to de Heem; possibly by one of the lesser members of the family.

sents the rich man's table, spread with costly food and vessels. Our attention is attracted first of all to the white linen tablecloth, which is shoved back over one corner, revealing a dark cloth beneath. This is an unfortunate, because conspicuous, caprice. Moreover, the table has too many different groups. One does not know whether to admire most the highly finished objects of the goldsmith's art, the glass beakers of wine, the basket of fruit, the lobster, or the arm chair, cluttered like the table, with plates and pitchers. And for what reason, we ask, is the clumsy clock introduced? We feel on the whole that the composition is a *tour de force* on the part of the artist to show us his skill in minute detail.

An example of his simpler compositions is also in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (Fig. 30). The picture is a small one, and consists only of a large glass goblet of wine, a few oysters, a slice of lemon, and one bunch of grapes, all on a table covered by a cloth. The color scheme is a tonality in gold, yellow and brown. In his coloring he was more Flemish than Dutch in that he showed the brilliance and luminosity of Rubens and Snyders rather than the tonality of Brouwer or Terborch.

One of de Heem's most magnificent, and at the same time most characteristic pictures is in the Dresden Royal Museum. It shows us a still-life combined with a landscape. In the foreground is a vast collection of fruit, melons of various sorts, yellow, green and striped, grapes, berries and nuts. Plants are growing in the foreground—a thistle is conspicuous in the distance. Grape and melon leaves abound in profusion. Behind



JAN DAVIDSZOON DE HEEM, FESTOON OF FRUIT AND FLOWERS  
MAURITIUS, THE ISLE







ABRAHAM MIGNON, STILL-LIFE  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM



## DUTCH AND FLEMISH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

the group of fruit is the trunk of a twisted tree, on one of the branches of which a little bird has perched. Butterflies hover about. In one corner of the picture on the ground, is a bird's nest with two eggs in it, while a dead bird lies nearby. The composition is elaborate but unified. The interest centers where the light strikes the large melon in the centre. The whole picture scintillates with light and color. The artist's whim to place this choice collection in so romantic a spot is altogether delightful. De Heem is a wizard, indeed, who with his still-lives presents to us an enchanted world. De Heem's own country, Holland, is rich in examples of his work, and Amsterdam and The Hague possess examples of his flower pieces. Perhaps it was by his simple decorative flower studies that he has wielded most influence. In these the backgrounds are generally black, the flowers being richly relieved against them. These decorations are becoming popular again in our own day.

De Heem was the greatest of the large family of de Heems, of whom there were no less than six (David the Elder, David Davidszoon, David the Younger, Jan, Jan the Younger, and Cornelis), a dynasty of still-life painters. Undoubtedly the prolixity of this family had much to do with their fame. Besides these there were many pupils, among whom were Elias van den Broeck, Maria van Oosterwijk, Abraham Mignon and Pieter de Ringh. In Flanders Jacob van Es and Adriaan van Utrecht may be mentioned as, in a sense, followers of the school.

But the best was Pieter de Ringh of Leiden (1615-1660). Very few still-life painters surpassed him in

harmony of coloring. There is a fine example of his work in the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam (Fig. 31). As with the de Heem in New York, there is a table in front of a column with a huge curtain held up by a cord for a background. This gives us the palatial setting. On the table spread by a rich cloth is the collection of fruit and other dainties suitable for a grand repast. The fruit is piled in baskets in pyramidal form, the back and apex of the pyramid being a large golden urn. There are peaches, oranges and grapes, with grape leaves plentifully interspersed, relieving the brilliant yellows and oranges with their cool green. A lobster is conspicuous at the base, to give a broad mass of color in contrast to the smaller spots. The ensemble is rich, voluptuous, magnificent, as the artist intended it to be.

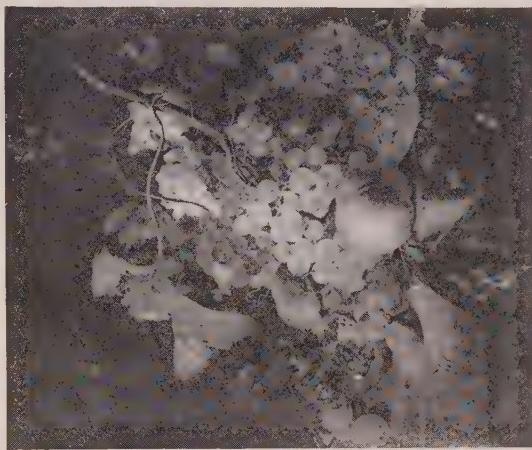
Abraham Mignon (1640-1679) was another worthy pupil of de Heem (Figs. 33 and 34). Although a German by birth he worked nearly all his life in Holland. There are several fine pictures by him in the Ryks Museum of Amsterdam in the style of his master, which show that flowers were as interesting to him as fruit, and that he could do either by themselves, or in happy combinations with pitchers, plates and goblets. Compared with de Heem, however, he is rather dry and tiresome.

But with Jan van Huysum of Amsterdam (1682-1749) we come to an original genius who surpassed in one sense all who came before him as a fruit and flower painter. Too young to be a pupil of de Heem—his only master as far as we know was his father, Justus van Huysum—he was nevertheless inspired by the Utrecht master. In his own day, he was perhaps the most highly



ABRAHAM MIGNON, FLOWERS  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM





JAN VAN HUYSUM, FRUIT  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM



JAN VAN HUYSUM, FRUIT  
LOUVRE, PARIS



prized of all the fruit and flower painters. He was the first to paint successfully flowers against a white or a golden background. He has all the magic of de Heem, his richness, his fantasy, his delicacy, but not his voluptuousness. He is a far more tasteful painter, with more restraint, a more refined sense of the limitations of a single picture, a better understanding of what a still-life ought to express. His compositions are less grandiose; many of them are in fact very simple although they are always minute to the point of being painful.

One of his fruit pictures is in the Louvre (Fig 35). It shows us a marble table cluttered with fruit and flowers, apparently out in a garden, for behind and overhead is the dark foliage of trees, while to one side is a marble urn. This suggestion of the palace garden is exceedingly appropriate as a background for the rich display before us, while at the same time it appeals to our imagination in a much more subtle way than de Heem's landscape settings do. But the fruit and flowers take up most of the picture, and they are so brilliantly lighted that there is no wavering of attention. No artist has succeeded better than van Huysum in combining fruit and flowers. His ingenuity in contrasting light fruit against dark, small shapes against large, so there could be no monotony of form, astounds us. He does not depend upon variety of objects for his variety, as a lesser artist would do, but attains this by making bold use of his stems of grapes, their leaves and tendrils, by a few flowers, rightly placed.

Another one in the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam (Fig. 36), is similar in style to that in the Louvre, save that the

display of fruit is on a table with a neutral background. Bunches of grapes are again the chief interest, with their lustrous green and white surfaces, while grape leaves with well-designed stems, and larger fruit such as oranges, give contrast and variety. The effect is above all rich, bright, scintillating with light and color.

There is a criticism which must be made of van Huysum as a flower painter which applies in a greater or lesser degree to all Dutch flower painters. Reference has been made already to his painful minuteness. This minuteness was apt to result in a crispness and hardness which flowers should not have. Flowers are above all else soft in texture, and so delicate as to defy precision. It cannot be said that the Dutch flower painters were successful with textures.

The van Huysum type of still-life was imitated by Conrad Roepel (1678-1748), a painter who was very prolific but not altogether original. He continued the school long into the eighteenth century.

The fame of Jan van Huysum might be justly contrasted with that of Willem van Aelst. While the former may be more celebrated, certainly the latter is equally distinguished; he is even more prized by collectors today. Willem van Aelst of Delft (1626-1679) was a pupil of his uncle Evert van Aelst of Delft (1602?-1657?), a painter of dead game, and of Otto Marseus van Schrieck (1619/20-1678). This interesting succession of still-life painters is worth noting, as showing the great variety of still-life that was being tried in Holland. Otto Marseus painted foregrounds full of plants, among which crawled lizards and snakes,



JAN VAN HUYSUM, FRUIT AND FLOWERS  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM







RACHEL RUYSCH, FLOWERS  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM



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while butterflies hovered about the flowers. His pupil, Willem van Aelst, was the master in turn of Rachel Ruysch, who borrowed, like Huysum, Marseus' forest foregrounds with plants and insects.

There are two pictures in the Mauritshuis, The Hague, which should place Willem van Aelst very high as a still-life painter. One is a hunting piece with dead game. The coloring is fresh as if not a day old, with delicate touches of red, brown and ochre enlivening the even grey tone of the whole. A minute touch is shown in the fly on the bird's wing; but the effect is not meticulous. The other picture is a flower piece in the style of de Heem, but given an individuality by a rich orange marguerite in the centre of the composition. In these two still-lives Willem van Aelst shows himself to be a tonalist of the first rank, and a technician as skillful as Dou. In fact one might well call him the Gerard Dou of pure still-life painting.

Rachel Ruysch (1664-1750) (Fig. 38) was one of the first women to gain renown in the field of art. The Dutch school of fruit and flower painting may be said to have culminated in her. She was for a time court painter to the Count Palatine and worked for him at Düsseldorf. It seems that this type of picture—the rich and elaborate collection of things pleasant to the eye and to the taste, was especially admired by princes and great lords. Maria van Oosterwijk (1630-1693) before mentioned, a pupil of the great de Heem, worked for such potentates as Louis XIV of France, the Emperor Leopold, William III of England, and the king of Poland.

Both these women, although good technicians and in-

## POTS AND PANS

genious composers had little originality. Ruysch's pictures are in the style of de Heem and van Huysum. One of her works in the Pinakothek at Munich pictures a collection of melons and fruit at the base of a gnarled tree, in a landscape. There are butterflies and bird's-nests of de Heem, but the mass is disorganized, and her shapes unfortunate. Her art is like her period, the eighteenth century in art, as we found in other branches of still-life painting, a mere reflection of what is past.

But, luckily for us, the succession of fruit and flower painters was never interrupted in Holland. Van Huy sum had two imitators, at least, in Margareta Haver man (1720-1791), whose microscopic minuteness is beyond description, and Jan van Os who lived from 1744 to 1808, and who therefore carried the style into the nineteenth century. His daughter, Margarita van Os (1780-1863), had some reputation as a flower painter, but she was completely overshadowed by Maria Vos of Oosterbeek who revived the glory of the seventeenth century still-life painters. She was, however, a versatile genius, and is best known, not for her flower pieces, but for her dead fowl with baskets and natural back grounds somewhat in the style of Fyt, or for her porcelain, Delft and metal vases with fruit in the style of Kalff.



ABRAHAM VAN BEYEREN, FLOWERS  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM





## IV

## HERRING AND WINE

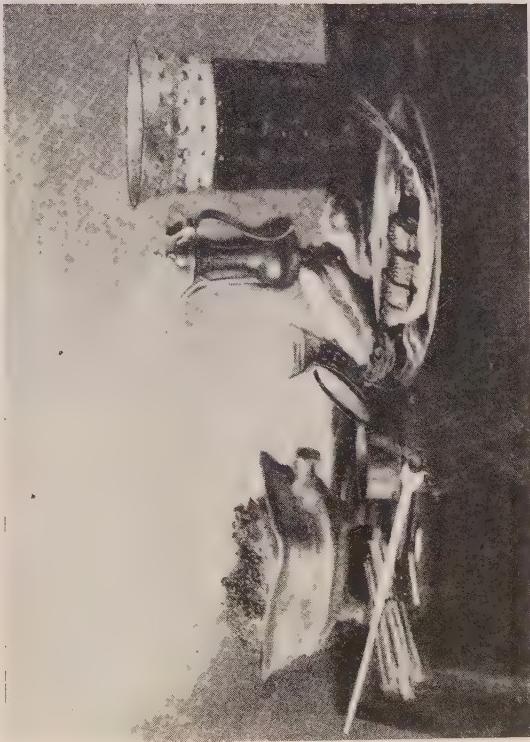
It is a constant enigma to us moderns how in the seventeenth century separate schools of painting with individual local styles could develop in little towns scarce an hour's journey apart. Haarlem today seems like a suburb of Amsterdam; it is only twenty minutes in the train, and yet here a school of still-life painters worked and produced pictures quite distinct from any others we have yet studied. Pieter Claesz (about 1590-1661), Willem Claesz Heda (1594-after 1679), and his son Gerrit Willemz Heda (1642-1702), were the principal painters of this school; others were Willem Kalff, Franz Hals the Younger (1617-1669), Pieter Roestraten (1630-1698), Claes van Heusen (fl. 1626), whose works are very rare, and Roelof Claesz Koets (fl. 1642). Willem Gabron (1619-1678), although of Antwerp, also painted in the style of Claesz and Heda. "Breakfasts" their pictures are often called, but this term does not sufficiently describe them. A simple repast like a breakfast is often portrayed, but the combination of food and drink displayed seems sometimes impossible for a breakfast. And more often than not the simplicity of the repast seems inadequate, as when it consists of a slice of bread and a lemon. There is a picture by Pieter Claesz, formerly in the van Oldenbarneveldt Collection, Holland, now in the Wilstach Collection, Philadelphia (Fig. 40), which shows us a table set with a plate of sliced herring, a large bumper of beer, a coffee pot, a glass of Rhine wine, two rolls of bread, a dish of green

## POTS AND PANS

vegetables, a pipe and a tobacco box. The herring is certainly meant for breakfast—Dutch herring! What wonderful memories they evoke!—and the pipe is meant for the after-breakfast smoke in the good old times when one did not rush off for business. Let us hope the beer, wine and coffee were not for the same person to drink.

If Claesz' pictures are breakfasts, then various wines and beers were popular in Holland early in the morning. In one of his still-lives in the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam, there are several drinking vessels, a glass goblet with wine, a mug with a lid of repousée design, a silver plate, and a partly peeled lemon on a pewter dish with nuts. A more nourishing "breakfast" is portrayed in another still-life in the same museum (Fig. 41), for here on the table lie, on pewter dishes, a red herring, a loaf of bread and a half peeled lemon, while beside them are a pewter salt cellar, a large beaker of ale and a vine branch in the background for a fanciful color note. A Claesz in Budapest is interesting for the sliced pie which is introduced. His picture in the Mauritshuis, The Hague, is also a very striking one. It has the coloring of a loaf of bread!

Never again shall we meet with this humility, this contentment with the plainest things of life, as subjects for art, until we come to Chardin, and the great Chardin, both in subject matter and coloring is very like Claesz. Herein lies the charm of these still-lives. They seem so casual, so commonplace, so matter-of-fact. In short, they are homely affairs, and therefore good companions—comfortable. Just as there is nothing grandiose about the subjects, there is nothing glowing nor brilliant about



PIETER CLAESZ, "BREAKFAST PIECE"

WILSTACH COLLECTION, PHILADELPHIA



## DUTCH AND FLEMISH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

the coloring. In contrast to the Flemish painters—Snyders and Fyt for example—who loved warmth and glow—these Haarlem painters sought rather subdued harmonies, atmospheric effects and blended tones.

Willem Claesz Heda was the finest of the Haarlem still-life painters. He is noted for his taste in arranging herrings with silver and golden vessels, glasses, cups and lemons. These things are nearly always placed on a white cloth, and the whole scheme enveloped in a grey tonality. His coloring is apt to be a trifle too metallic—too hard, with an insistence on cold greyish purple tones and lacking in warm golden hues.

A fine Heda is in the Dresden Museum. Its composition is more complex than is usual with Claesz. Against a perfectly bare background—a wall—is the table, with its white cloth partly turned back, and set with the following articles: a large glass half filled with wine, an overturned cake dish, a plate with a large meat pie, cut open, other plates and other glasses, a serving spoon and a richly sheathed knife.

Heda's "Breakfast Tables" are set with costly vessels. While unpretentious compared with the fruit and flower pieces of de Heem and van Huysum, Heda loved to offset his herring with elegant and rich utensils.

The Heda in the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam (Fig. 42), shows a table filled with drinking utensils of pewter, silver and glass, with a half-peeled orange. In Budapest there is a fine example of his work, approaching Kalff in style. The composition is exceedingly rich; a table covered with a plush cloth, over which is crumpled a piece of white linen, is laden with glasses and various costly table

## POTS AND PANS

utensils. On a large meat platter is a cut ham. This would be, indeed, a bounteous breakfast table.

Heda was the best of the Haarlem painters, but he was not the most celebrated of the school he represents. Abraham van Beyeren of The Hague (1620-1675), in reality stands in a class by himself, as the greatest master of sea-fish painters, the forerunner of Vollon and Chase. But he also painted breakfast pieces, hence we can include him here. Probably no Holland still-life painter attained such richness with harmony of color as he. Fish, after all, are wonderful animals as far as coloring is concerned. Like birds, they are protected by nature from their enemies and given colors that hide them in their environment; fish have all the iridescence of water.

There is a good van Beyeren in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. It is a study of fish. On a table one sees a pile of fish, large and small, talbots, sliced salmon, and crabs. Some are in a basket, others are scattered about. The background is neutral, the light being concentrated on the fish.

Mrs. William L. Elkins of Philadelphia possesses an example of this master's work which illustrates his richest style. On a table covered with a blue cloth edged with silver fringe is a wicker basket, holding a silver dish filled with grapes, peaches and figs. On the left of this is a golden beaker and a silver plate with a ham; behind this again is a Delft stein and a tall Renaissance cup. In the foreground on a white cloth is a silver tray with a lobster and two Rhine wine glasses, and nearby some oysters and a small loaf of bread. This bare description gives some indication of the variety of the coloring of



PIETER CLAESZ. "BREAKFAST PIECE"  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM



WILLEM CLAESZ HEDA, STILL-LIFE  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM



## DUTCH AND FLEMISH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

the picture, but the work must be seen if its glow is to be appreciated. And this glow, this luminosity, is the chief charm of van Beyeren. It can be compared to old Flemish glass—so mellow, so transparent—with its amber, citron, russet and olive tones.

In the Widener Collection, also in Philadelphia, there is a work by van Beyeren, in the painter's rich and elegant style, while in the Wilstach Collection, Philadelphia, is a characteristic example of his fish. One of the best van Beyerens is in the Berlin Museum. On a wooden table are large talbots, sliced salmons, flounders and crabs. Behind, giving a pyramidal composition, is a brass bucket. This is less elaborate than the one above described, is more purely a study of fish and perhaps the most tasteful example of the master's work.

Willem Kalff of Amsterdam (1621 or 1622-1693) belongs, also, indirectly to the Haarlem school. He was the most celebrated still-life painter of Holland, and for that matter of all the Low Countries, Flanders included. Perhaps his fame is partly due to the Dutch poet Vondel who immortalized his still-lives in charming verse. But he deserves it. If it were possible ever to say one man is the supreme master of his art, we would say Kalff was the greatest of all the Dutchmen, as still-life painters. In choice of subject, arrangement, lighting, coloring, tonality, he was unsurpassed by any of his time.

Kalff chose subjects of the most tasteful character, objects best suited for still-life painting. With pots and pans, and market produce, Teniers made arrangements full of interesting form and color. With animals and

wild fowl Snyders and Fyt and Weenix made rich and colorful canvases. With fruits and flowers de Heem and van Huysum bewilder us with their wealth of detail. But Kalff gives us permanent joy by his superbly decorative arrangement of richly contrasted color—blue porcelain plates, amber colored wine glasses, golden vases—objects which would be the envy of the collector. Whatever may be said for carrots and cabbages, larders well stocked with food and household utensils—and we love all these things with their associations—we would rather possess rare china, golden cups and Venetian glass!

But these things do not make up the charm of Kalff's still-lives. In arrangement Kalff is the most restrained of all the still-life painters. We have said that crowding too many objects into a picture was a fault to which still-life painters are only too prone, and oftentimes painters like de Heem and Rachel Ruysch were not able to relate and unite all the elements in their pictures. Kalff never falls into this error. He does not care for *tours de force*, for a show of skill, for elaboration. Next to Weenix he is the most decorative of the still-life painters, depending on proper spacing, balance of forms, and rich coloring. There are few objects in his pictures, and these are generally large in proportion to the canvas, and well varied as to relative size and shape. Lastly we must mention his light, which is strong and concentrated upon the point of attention, oftentimes on the amber-colored wine in a glass, or on a lemon, showing off in this way the brightest note in his color arrangement. As an Amsterdam painter, he fell under the influence of Rembrandt



GERRIT WILLEMS HEDA, STILL-LIFE  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM





WILLEM KALFF, STILL-LIFE  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM





## DUTCH AND FLEMISH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

—hence oftentimes his superb golden tones and rich shadows. His coloring is much like Vermeer's; one often finds the same preference for the blue and yellow notes; in many ways, indeed, he may be called the Vermeer of still-life painting.

Pictures by Kalff are extremely rare and valuable. The best one is in the Copenhagen Museum. Emil Carlsen, who knows something about still-lives, has said it is the finest still-life painting existing anywhere in the world. The one in the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam (Fig. 44), is also a splendid example. It has all the qualities enumerated above. The objects are arranged against a large, plain dark background—no curtain, no marble pillars, no view—nothing to disturb the main interest. Conspicuous on the table is, first, a silver pitcher *repoussée* of hydria shape, whose polished raised surface reflects a beautiful light. Back of this, or rather to one side, is a Chinese porcelain bowl with oranges and lemons, and behind the pitcher and the bowl, in the center of the composition, is a tall, yellow goblet, indistinct in the shadow. On the oranges in the foreground, and on the *repoussée* design of the pitcher the light is concentrated. The edge of the table shows at the bottom with one or two fruit leaves to break the straight line. With these few objects, Kalff has given us a decorative scheme, so well balanced, so happily designed, so rich in color yet delicate in tone, so simple and dignified that many of the de Heems, de Ringhs, and even the Snyders seem tawdry in comparison. Another very fine Kalff, and similar to the above, is in The Hague Museum. From the first one

## POTS AND PANS

is struck by the blue porcelain bowl and the lemon—the coloring of Vermeer.

In the Johnson Collection in Philadelphia, which, by the way, includes the fine "Slaughtered Ox" by Rembrandt, is one of the more elaborate compositions of Kalff, approaching Heda in variety. It resembles closely another Kalff in the Berlin Museum. In this we see again Kalff's favorite blue porcelain bowl, his half-peeled lemon, and his wine cups.

Philadelphia possesses another Kalff in the Widener Collection, one of his very restrained and simple pictures. A porcelain plate on a table contains apples and lemons.

Kalff's influence upon subsequent still-life painters has properly and naturally been very great. In his own day Jan Jans Treck (Amsterdam 1606-1652) (Figs. 45 and 47), Simon Luttichuys (1610-1663) and Jurian van Streeck (1632-1678) were influenced by him. Pieter Roestraten carried this style of still-life painting to England. Chardin, the great Frenchman, if not reflecting Kalff, at least reflects the Haarlem "breakfast" style. The same is true of Velasquez. These men were the ones who said the final word for Dutch still-life painting, who perfected this art. Had it not been for them, it is doubtful if Dutch still-life painting would have maintained the prestige that it has.

FRANCISCUS GYSBRECHTS, "VANITAS"  
IN THE COLLECTION OF MR. BIERENS DE HAAN, AMSTERDAM



JAN JANS TRECK, STILL-LIFE  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM







JAN JANS TRECK, STILL-LIFE  
BUDAPEST MUSEUM



## CHAPTER 4

THE VANITAS AND BODEGONE PAINTERS OF SPAIN



## CHAPTER 4

### I

#### ALONZO VASQUEZ (ABOUT 1550-ABOUT 1650)

The close political connection between Spain and the Netherlands made the Dutch and Flemish painters familiar to the Spaniards. The sovereigns of Spain knew the value of Flemish art and were great collectors of the primitives. Perhaps it was the realism mixed with mysticism which we find in the primitive school which appealed to Spanish taste. Fortunately for art the iconoclastic tendencies of the Reformation, so destructive in the Low Countries, did not affect the Spanish peninsula, and Spain was able to preserve the great altarpieces of the religious age.

Flemish tradition was not merely a matter of connoisseurship upon the part of Spanish patrons. It went to the roots of Spanish art itself. Painters like Roger van der Weyden and Quentin Matsys served as models for the Spanish primitives. Even in the Renaissance period, when the influence of classicism was at its height, Flemish influence was still strong. It may be said that

## POTS AND PANS

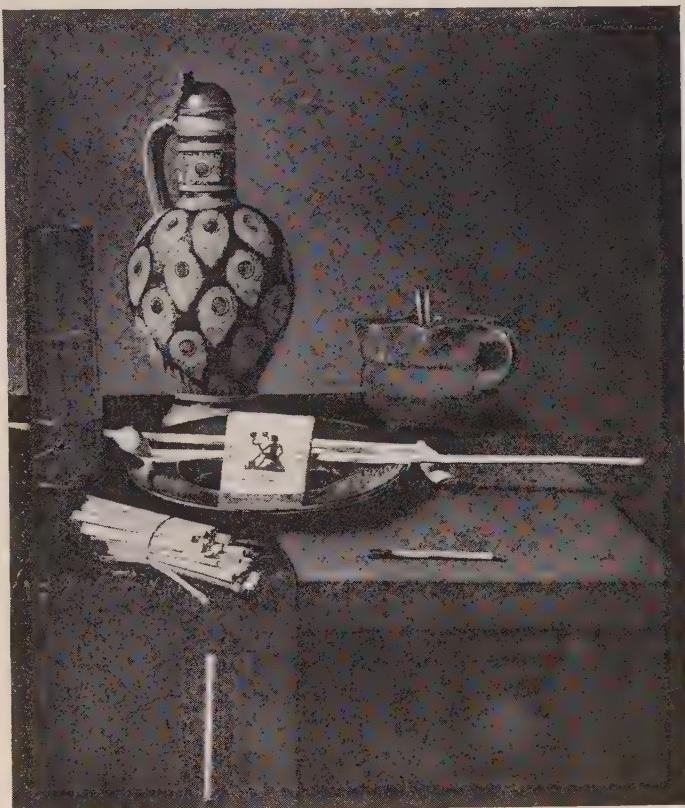
the Spanish painters were taught the Italian style under the tutelage of Netherland masters.

At the beginning of the seventeenth century three Dutchmen were among the leading painters of Spain—Pieter Kempenaer (called in Spanish Pedro de Campana), Ferdinand Sturm (Hernando Sturmio or Desturnes) and Franz Fruter (Francisco Fruter). These men were contemporary with Alonzo or Ildefonso Vasquez, called by Pacheco, the Spanish historian, “The Father of Bodegones.” “Bodegones” is a Spanish word for studio pieces with genre and still-life. Undoubtedly Vasquez was influenced to paint such scenes by the genre pictures of the Antwerp school with which he was familiar. He was a sort of Netherland Romanist. But the still-life pictures for which he was noted seem to be lost, unless a still-life in Budapest, ascribed to him, is really his. His most famous picture is the “Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man” in which he lavishes the greatest care on table settings—goblets, copper flasks, rich food and fruit in abundance. He is thus the Pieter Aertz or Joachim de Beukelaer of Spain.

## II

### VELASQUEZ (1599-1660)

It is a singular fact that the work of Velasquez, the greatest Spanish artist, has often been confused with that of painters of the Dutch and Flemish schools; that is, pictures by Sustermans, Terborch, Franz Hals and Rubens have been labelled by uncritical collectors “Velasquez,” but never have Velasquez’ works been



HUBERT VAN RAVESTEYN, PIPES  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM





## THE VANITAS AND BODEGONE PAINTERS OF SPAIN

confused with those of his Spanish contemporaries—Coello, El Greco, Roelas, or Herrera.

It is not necessary, however, to look for the direct influence of any Dutchman upon Velasquez. We could as well look for the influence of Caravaggio. The governing impulse of the art of the seventeenth century was realistic, and it is a striking sign of the genius of Velasquez that he was aware instinctively, while still a youth, of the tendencies of the age in which he lived, while his contemporaries of his own land were not. So that, at the outset of his career it seemed as though he were intended to belong not so much to Spain as to the whole world.

He was fortunate in his master—the man who afterward became his father-in-law—Pacheco. Velasquez' naturalistic tendencies were in direct opposition to the classical theories approved by Pacheco; yet the latter wisely encouraged his pupil. To use Pacheco's own words, so often quoted, yet most appropriate to our discussion, "What should we say about still-life studies? It is clear that if they are painted as my son-in-law painted them (achieving such success that he left others far behind) they are worthy of great commendation. With these studies and with the portraits of which we have spoken, he soon achieved a true copy of nature, converting to his own methods the minds of many others who were influenced by his example."<sup>1</sup>

The impulse to paint *bodegones* may have come from Francesco Herrera who was for a short time Velasquez' master, for Herrera had attained some celebrity as a

<sup>1</sup> Sentenach, "Painters of the School of Seville," p. 107.

painter of such pictures, but, as we learn from Pacheco, Velasquez owed to no one his determination to master the reality of things, and these early studies were his own means of training himself for the end he had in view.

The youthful pictures of Velasquez must be looked upon in this light, as his preparation for his career. While he was always interested in the still-life accessories of his pictures, especially in his genre subjects, his *bodegone* period lasted only until about 1621—up to his first visit to Madrid, yet, if we judge by the many attributions, the pictures of this period extant are numerous. Palomino says: “Velasquez, in his early days, took to representing with singular fancy and notable genius, beasts, birds, fishes, fishmarkets and tippling houses, with perfect imitation of nature.” We have no pure still-lives left to us. Of the *bodegones* now known to be his, all have figures introduced, but merely to add interest to the still-life.

The earliest of these is the “Christ in the House of Mary and Martha” in the National Gallery, London. Quite in the Dutch spirit, the prominence is given to Martha, who, a peasant girl type, is busy with mortar and pestle at a table on which are fish and onions. Next in chronological order is perhaps the so-called “Breakfast,” formerly in the Hermitage Collection, Petrograd. It represents a table at which a man and two boys are dining. It is evident by the care with which the tablecloth, the dish, and articles of food are painted that these things are the chief interest. Like this last-mentioned picture is “Two Boys Dining” in the Collection



VELASQUEZ, THE OMELETTE WOMAN  
IN THE COLLECTION OF SIR FREDERICK COOK, BART.  
RICHMOND, ENGLAND







VELASQUEZ, THE STEWARD  
IN THE COLLECTION OF SIR J. C. ROBINSON, C.B.



#### THE VANITAS AND BODEGONE PAINTERS OF SPAIN

of the Duke of Wellington, Apsley House, England, which is principally a study of earthenware dishes and jars.

Of greater interest from the still-life point of view is Velasquez' "Old Woman Cooking Eggs" or, as it is also called, "The Omelette" in the Cook Collection, Richmond (Fig. 49), where there is an elaborate display of cooking utensils. "The Steward" in the collection of Sir J. C. Robinson, England, is another such picture (Fig. 50). The steward stands behind a great table laden with fish, poultry and other food, while hanging from the ceiling about his head are huge cuts of meat.

"The Water Carrier of Seville" in Apsley House must also be mentioned in this group because it is the finest and most justly famous of the period. While the figure claims the greatest attention because of the sympathetic rendering of an aged type, the prominence given to the water bottle—a fine study of the texture of earthenware—and to the glass of water, makes it a true *bodegone*.

All of these pictures have similar qualities, in being very large, with life-sized figures, and almost monochromes. Velasquez, at this period, did not strive for the shimmering effects of his later pictures; he was studying values and struggling for an uncompromising truthfulness in representing what he saw. By these studies he became finally one of the supreme masters of tone, and one of the most startlingly realistic figure painters in Europe. Artists themselves have never ceased to wonder at his extraordinary force. His in-

fluence in the nineteenth century was very strong, especially on one still-life painter—Manet.

## III

## VALDES LEAL (1622-1690)

Quite a different still-life painter was Don Juan de Valdes Leal. He is noted for two large "Vanitas" pictures in the hospital de la Caridad, Seville. Mention has been made before of the early Flemish Vanitas pictures attributed to Quentin Matsys or to his school. They generally contain a death's head, a few books, a candlestick and sometimes a parchment roll with the inscription "Vanitas," the obvious meaning being, of course, that all is vanity, even the wisdom of this world.

Valdes Leal's two pictures are the most elaborate in their allegory as well as the most grandiose things of their kind. They are unique in art. Painted at the height of his career, in 1672, they are not only sumptuous and rich in color beyond description, but they are executed in a masterly way. They were done at the command of Don Miguel de Mañara, a man who represented all that was pessimistic and morbid in the Spanish temperament. Certainly we cannot conceive of their having been painted outside of Spain (Figs. 51 and 52).

One is called "Allegory of Death." It shows a floor piled high with books of every description, and with pieces of armour—swords, breastplates and helmets. There is also a sceptre. On a sort of platform behind this pile is a papal tiara, a crosier, a crown, a cardinal's hat and a collar of the Golden Fleece. A papal staff



JUAN DE VALDES LEAL, ALLEGORY OF DEATH  
IN THE HOSPITAL DE LA CARIDAD, SEVILLE







JUAN DE VALDES LEAL  
ALLEGORY OF THE BREVITY OF LIFE  
IN THE HOSPITAL DE LA CARIDAD, SEVILLE



rests against the platform. In the background is a huge candelabrum; about the burning flame are written the words: "In ictu oculi"—"In a wink all is over." But the most conspicuous object in the picture is a huge skeleton, or figure of Death, trampling upon the pile of earthly adornments. Under one arm it carries a coffin and a scythe; with the other it points to the inscription.

Morbid as such a conception is, it is entirely surpassed in gruesomeness by its companion picture, "Allegory of the Brevity of Life." In a dark burial vault, inhabited by bats and owls, stand three open coffins, two of which are placed together in the foreground. In one is the body of a bishop, half eaten by worms, almost a skeleton; in the other is the body of a knight. The bishop clutches his crosier, the knight his sword and shield. Below, on a scroll, are the words: "Finis Gloria Mundi"—"Gone is the glory of the world." But this is not all. From above, out of clouds, stretches an arm holding a pair of scales. In one scale are symbols of earthly folly—a little dog, a peacock, a goat's head and the word "Nimas"—"Not more"; in the other scale are the symbols of religious life—a Bible, a loaf of bread, a crucifix, a flaming heart inscribed I. H. S., and the word "Nimenos"—"Not less."

Murillo, when he saw this picture, said to the painter Leal, "Comrade, one cannot look at it without holding one's nose."

## IV

## PEREDA (ABOUT 1608-1678)

The only other Spanish painter who, as a creator of Vanitas pictures, is worthy to be placed alongside of Valdes Leal, is Antonio Pereda of Madrid. He worked with Velasquez in Madrid, and in his clear, cool colors reflects the great master.

There are signed still-lives by him in the galleries of Lisbon and Petrograd (until 1914) dated 1652-1653, a Vanitas in the Hofmuseum of Vienna, and one attributed either to him or to Valdes Leal in the Stirling Collection, England. His most important still-life, however, is a Vanitas allegory of idleness, called "The Dream of a Knight" in the Madrid Academy.

The knight is seated beside a table on which are the things of his dreams—symbols of every sort of wealth—money, jewels, badges of knightly orders, pieces of armour, wreaths, crowns, mitres and tiaras, but also the open book and the death's head.

Still-life pictures these allegories are; figures, to be sure, are introduced, but there is no action. Yet it cannot be said the Spanish school produced any great still-life painting. The Vanitas pictures are too moralistic to be considered examples of pure art. Velasquez' *bodegones* answer more clearly to our definition. Still-life painting is to be understood from the art of men like Kalff, who, without recourse to figures or to sentiment, made use of mere objects, and, purely by the language of art gave expression to the emotions these objects created.

**CHAPTER 5**  
**FRENCH STILL-LIFE PAINTING**

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## CHAPTER 5

### I

#### CHARDIN, 1699-1779

Chardin was a man who could do very simple things in a very simple way—lifting them to the sublime. There is no higher praise than this. It is the praise we would accord the spiritual leaders of our race, the St. Francises, the Brother Laurences, the Wordsworths, the men who taught the world to find love and joy and beauty where they have never been found before! If one questions if Chardin is worthy of this company, the answer is, he has shown us forever the spiritual value of silent things—yes, even of pots and pans.

There are certain geniuses, and a few artists, poets, writers, who move through history unswerved by passing fashions in art, and who hand on to succeeding generations those permanent qualities that are too precious for the race to lose. Chardin continued in France the Dutch tradition of genre painting.

Chardin's self-portrait is a description of the man and of his art. He shows us himself, unflattered, the plain

man that he was. He looks at one honestly, bluntly, behind his clumsy horn spectacles—no self-conscious air, no piercing glance, no haughty poise of the head. Perhaps we would enjoy a more animated, spirited face; it is a bit phlegmatic. He might have worn for this occasion a more becoming hat, but no, he prefers us to know him as he really is. What impresses us, above all, is the genuineness of the man, his permanent human qualities.

And this is his art: intensely human, perfectly genuine, an art for the people. In character, unaffected by passing fashions; but in technical qualities, composition, luminosity, coloring, tonality, so superior and at the same time so modern, that since his day—even in our own time, those who admire him most are the painters themselves, the *connoisseurs*. For these reasons Chardin remains a master whose pictures seem to belong more to ourselves, to be in spirit closer to our own times, than those of any other Frenchman of the past.

He is one of the enigmas of French art. It is futile to try to account for him fully. He remained absolutely apart from his age, from his French environment. The art of his day was expressed by such painters as Largillièrē, Rigaud, de Latour, Nattier, Perronneau, Watteau, Lancret, Pater, Boucher and Fragonard.

The age which preceded him, that of Louis XIV, demanded of art “the grand style,” in portraiture haughty pomposity, grandiloquence, self-conscious superiority; in other fields of painting classical elegance and grandeur, all that went with the extravagant court of “the great monarch.” The art of the Regency and

of Louis Quinze, which was Chardin's age, was a rebellion against these things. French taste, tired of the dignified pose, swung to light-headed gaiety. In portraiture Nattier and his school sought charm and coquettish grace rather than hauteur; in figure subjects Watteau responded to the new demand, and gave to the world pictures of poetic and idyllic fancy. Watteau was a much more serious painter than the public of his day was aware of. His art was understood to be merely fantastic, and his successors, Lancret, Pater and Boucher, produced those delightfully superficial and altogether French works of art which were imitated in the eighteenth century by the whole world. For it is particularly the genius of the French to be able to be gay—in a sense to coquette with life—and yet maintain that amount of restraint which is necessary for refinement. This is what gave eighteenth century French art a piquancy we have never ceased to admire—and the lack of which we most deplore today.

Chardin ought to have been a Dutchman. He was planted into a world in which he did not seem to belong. Or are we judging France of his day by the art of his time? Chardin, the man of simple tastes, might have been far more representative of the true French character than we would ever suppose from most eighteenth century French art. Chardin's own paintings picture to us a side of life we never see in any other painting of the day. They seem convincing. Let us hope they are the true pictures of French life. Take, for example, "The House of Cards" or "Child with a Top," both pictures of little boys at a table; these show us an interest

in homely joys which has nothing in common with the artificiality we are more familiar with in the art of the court. This interest in the genre—as well as his love for still-life—is Dutch in spirit, but there is a subtle suggestion in all his works of something French. It may be their delicate refinement, their perfect tastefulness, their elevated sentiment which leads one to feel this. There is an elevation about Chardin's art that we seldom find in the Dutch. We may be thankful therefore that he was French and could contribute something mysterious and new to still-life painting.

I have said that his art was intensely human; it may sound strange to say this about the art of a still-life painter. I refer principally to his "Interiors" such as "*La Pourvoyeuse*" or "*La Benedicité*," but Chardin's still-lives have this quality too, peculiar as it may seem. Not all of them, for sometimes he fell into the fault of making elaborate groups which are too obviously "arrangements." But his best still-lives are so naturally grouped that they seem to have been left—carelessly perhaps—as if the cook had turned her back for a moment, and given the painter his opportunity. Chardin won his reputation as a painter by a still-life picture. His famous "*Skate*" of 1728, now in the Louvre, was the picture that gained his membership in the French Academy. There is something highly instructive in the story of this "*Skate*." That such pompous painters as Largillièrē or Cazes could find in a painting of this kind qualities that gave it a place beside the greatest works of the period, is indicative that even in a superficial, aristocratic age a sincere and simple genius was appre-

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ciated. The picture shows us a tableful of sea-food and kitchen utensils—fish, oysters, bottles, jugs and pans, among which a cat is eagerly prowling. In the foreground is a large crumpled napkin, and in the background, most conspicuous, an enormous skate, hanging by a chain.

By this picture Chardin proved his artistic descent from Abraham van Beyeren and the Haarlem school. But in spite of this his still-lives have an independence of their own. There is one in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, entitled simply "Still-Life," but it had much better be called "Waiting for the Cook," or "Materials for the Dinner" (Fig. 53). Predominant is a large kettle for stewing, with its ladle; beside it is a tall jug or earthen pitcher. On the table are also a fowl, a breast of lamb, a mortar and pestle, a few other less important articles, and a white towel. This white towel is the finest bit of painting in the picture. The background is plain, neutral in tone, and the table, too, is treated simply, so that the light, concentrated on the fowl, the jug and the towel, brings the attention where it belongs with no diversion of interest. One does not feel, therefore, that Chardin painted these common objects, merely because they were interesting in themselves—although they were and still are—but chiefly because of their artistic value as contrasts in color and reflectors of light. It is the light on the towel, and its subtle shadows that we admire.

Another still-life by Chardin in the Boston Museum shows the same simplicity of arrangement (Fig. 54). Well composed it is, but there is nothing in its composition to excite one; these pictures of Chardin's, in contrast

to Weenix's are not designed for decorative effect; their charm lies in their intimacy. In this we have a large teapot, a few bunches of grapes, and a pear, that is all.

Chardin's still-life in the Metropolitan Museum is as humble as any of Pieter Claesz' (Fig. 55). It shows the painter to be not only the reverse of Weenix, but also the reverse of such highly finished painters as de Heem or van Huysum. Chardin cares nothing about the microscopic delicacy of a fly or a beetle that may happen to perch on a grape. This is what is so modern about Chardin. The picture in question is a sort of breakfast-piece—the breakfast of a very simple person. On a stone shelf there is a plate of fish, a fork, a broken loaf of bread, with a knife stuck into it, a bottle of wine and a beaker. Nothing could be rougher. Indeed it reminds one of a bit taken out of a Teniers or a Brouwer. Technically, too, the painting harmonizes with the subject. It is almost sketchily done. All that Chardin cared about—all that we care about, is the light on the broken crust against the dark rich tones of the bottle and the background.

Probably no master has shown so well the possibilities of oil as a medium for paint as does Chardin in such pictures as these. The suavity of his brush stroke, the fluidity of his modeling, the clearness of his colors, and the softness of his light are all so perfectly and easily accomplished that it seems as if the technical limitations of oil painting had been reached by this one man.

But if I were to be asked what constitutes the greatest charm of Chardin's work, I should say, it was not artistic

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cleverness, but something far more difficult—simple truth-telling, nothing more nor less.

Chardin is the link that connects the Dutch school of the seventeenth century with the French still-life painters of the nineteenth century. Until we come to Courbet, Vollon, Manet and Fantin-Latour, almost to our own times, we find little in still-life painting to arrest the attention. The Neo-Classical Revival, encouraged by the French Revolution, turned the eyes of artists to ancient Greece and Rome. Lofty themes alone were permitted to the painter. David, the autocrat in art, dominated the artistic world, and such pictures as "The Oath of the Horatii," "Brutus Condemning His Own Sons to Death for Treason against the State," became the standard by which all other pictures were judged. This was an art of borrowed ideas, as far removed from life as the Roman world was from our own. At the same time the coloring was as cold and dead as the corpses of the ancient heroes. Little wonder is it then that small attention could be paid the humble, the familiar and colorful things of life. Still-life, *nature morte*, was for nearly a century, dead in very truth.

## II

### COURBET, 1819-1877

Wherever we find realism or naturalism in western art, we find an interest in still-life. This is true of Italy and of the Netherlands; it is also true of France. Courbet, the first of the so-called realist school in France, was the first French still-life painter of any note since Chardin.

Between Chardin and Courbet there is one hundred years, and more. In that time French art had suffered many vicissitudes. Swayed, in Chardin's days, by the rococo school, which strove to emulate Watteau, then vanquished by the neo-classic revolution of David, later disciplined into the academicism of Ingres, and now striving for freedom through the romanticism of Géricault and Delacroix, French art needed the wholesome and robust leadership of a man like Courbet who could finally open the eyes of painters to a new vision of nature and reality, or to a new subject matter at least, and putting art once more to school with the soil, begin over again. At least that is what it seemed at the time. French critics and the public looked upon Courbet's "Funeral at Ornans" as the funeral of art, just as they had, before, considered Delacroix' "Massacre of Chios" as the massacre of art. So that, to many, it appeared that art was crucified and would have to be reborn, whereas in reality it was merely a return to nature. But these pictures deserved much of the opprobrium bestowed upon them. Delacroix' "Massacre" has little claim to our attention today, outside of its historic interest. Like its predecessor, Géricault's "Wreck of the Medusa," the first in the category of wrecks, massacres, and funerals for art, it was simply an expression of a revolt against the academic canon. Courbet's "Funeral at Ornans" is an unlovely thing, brutal, unnecessary. Its force is due to its representation of a homely circumstance in the life of peasant people, but because it possessed none of the imaginative qualities that make a work of art French—because it replaced the ideal for

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the matter-of-fact—the French public rightly condemned it.

Courbet's saying "*J'aime toutes les choses pour qu'elles sont*" sums up his attitude toward art. There is something very Dutch about this idea, for undoubtedly the Dutch loved things for themselves, for what they were. Courbet, very possibly, drew much inspiration from the Dutch. In his early years when he was still hesitating for expression, he spent much time in copying Rembrandt, Hals and van Dyck. Later he said that the only painters he admired were Ribera, Zurbaran and Velasquez—Spanish painters who never hesitated to paint the less agreeable realities of life. Next in the list of his elect came Holbein and the Dutch tavern painters Ostade and Craesbeck. At the head of this whole list is in reality Caravaggio, who links all the names from Rembrandt to Craesbeck together, although Courbet did not mention him. So the point of contact between Courbet and the Dutch is remote. Courbet descends from Caravaggio and Ribera. A Dutchman would never have represented a railway station, as Courbet did, just because it is a contemporary fact. Not even Brouwer—perhaps the boldest of the Dutch realists—painted things exactly as they were; he never seized the commonplace; he chose a dramatic episode, or at least a picturesque one, and while his canvases seem truthful to reality, they were always carefully arranged—even in a scene of disorder—and they are bathed in an atmosphere that softens their brutality.

We must, therefore, expect to find in Courbet's still-lives little that we are accustomed to. We will not

discover much of the picturesque—using the term in its strict sense to mean arrangement, pattern, design, relationship of spaces, variety of forms, play of light and shade. We must expect to find, instead, what appears to be a casual acceptance of things as they happen to be. His objects will not be placed; they will remain as they fell, or as they were poked into their places by some prosaic housemaid. Cézanne later employed the same composition.

It must be said, however, that Courbet's still-lives are less literal than his figure subjects. The circumstances under which they were painted palliated their brusqueness.

Courbet was born in Ornans, in Franche-Comté, but had a strain of German blood in his veins; indeed it was the strongest strain. He looked like a German—a German peasant—with a large bull neck, and enormous bulk, and he was German in his tastes. If one looks through his works, one will find that they are for the most part either coarse or sentimental. Only in his sylvan scenes with animals, and his landscapes, is he sincere. It is significant that nearly all of his still-lives were painted in his period of humiliation. His disgrace and imprisonment as the result of his part in the destruction of the Vendôme column in 1870, stripped him, robbed him, of his defiance. "They have killed me," he said to a friend, "and I shall never do anything good again." Deprived of his studio and of his models, he took to painting fruit and flowers, and these, rendered in the humble spirit of Chardin, awaken our sympathies as do no other works of Courbet.

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Perhaps the most tasteful picture he ever painted was his "Pheasants and Apples" in the possession of Mlle. Juliette Courbet (1912).<sup>1</sup> It comes the closest to being a decorative picture of any of his still-lives. We see here in a landscape two splendid birds, a male and a female, with gorgeous plumage. Their heads are turned backward, as if in some alarm, or as if they were on the alert for an enemy. In the foreground are several large apples, red and yellow, well contrasted and rich in color. It is a thoroughly original picture—Courbet is always original—vigorously composed, and freely executed. The boldness with which he dares to contrast the small birds against the correspondingly large apples, is characteristic of him, though just here lies the fault in the picture. The apples are of equal importance with the birds, or of greater importance, which is unpleasant to the eye. There is no other still-life picture like it; some of Jan Fyt's or Hondekoeter's come the nearest to it, and there is an old-master quality about it, with its deep rich tones and shadows.

This, however, is not a pure still-life. His "Fruit," of 1871, in a private collection in Scotland,<sup>2</sup> is a more characteristic example. On a dining table covered by a white cloth, is a collection of apples, pears, and quinces, piled high in front of a pot of growing flowers. The background represents a room with a fireplace, mantle, and a framed picture on the wall.

This is significant of Courbet's realism. The fireplace and mantel are unnecessary. Another criticism which at

<sup>1</sup> Can be found in Heineman's "French Artists of Our Day," pl. XLIV.

<sup>2</sup> Reproduced in MacColl, "Nineteenth Century Art," p. 146.

once arises is that there is a total lack of variety in the forms of the objects. The fruits are nearly all of the same size, and they seem too large in comparison with the flower pot. Kalff would have placed both large and small fruits in the composition, and there would have been one object more important than the rest, to concentrate the interest. No doubt things happen that way—but, we may ask, is it therefore necessary to paint them so? His “Apples” in the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam (Fig. 57), shows the same faults as “The Pheasants and Apples” before mentioned. While the apples themselves are well painted, they have the size of melons compared with the trees which serve as a background. One large yellow apple looks like a large quince.

Courbet, we have said, was best as an animal painter. His “Dead Stag” is painted much in the style of Snyders, and, while not original in treatment, is one of the most striking of the artist’s still-lives. The dead stag hangs by a tree in an open landscape—the landscape being like the backgrounds in Weenix’ pictures, giving the effect of tapestry.

Courbet stands at the threshold of a new era in still-life painting. He is neither an old master nor a modern one. Far greater men than he succeed him. So we will leave Courbet to pass on to Manet, the first great modern master of still-life.

## III

## MANET, 1832-1883

After six years of study under Couture, Manet threw over the academic style and, disgusted, traveled in search of a new vision. In the course of this search he married a Dutchwoman, Suzanna Leenhof of Delft, a woman of artistic tastes whose family was not inconspicuous in sculpture, engraving and music. It is thus perfectly clear what influence was strongest in determining his artistic development—the Dutch. It is true that he travelled in Spain, and his early paintings are strongly reminiscent of Velasquez and Goya, but other works recall Franz Hals. In either case, the original impetus is the same. What Manet discovered was a new realism, or naturalism, whichever one pleases to call it—not that of the brand of Courbet.

We can take four pictures to illustrate this point. "The Guitar Player" of 1860, the "Boy with a Sword" of 1861, the "Olympia" of 1865, and "The Bon Bock" of 1873. Of the first, Théophile Gautier said, "Here's a Guitarero who does not come from the Opéra Comique and who would cut a poor figure in a romantic lithograph; but Velasquez would hail it with a friendly wink, and Goya would ask him for a light for his 'papelito.' "

In truth it is in the spirit of the two great Spaniards, but it is significant that at this time Manet had not been to Spain. He had been interested in the performance of a troupe of Spanish dancers, and had painted one of the singers, in Paris, from the life. How is it then, that the picture recalls Velasquez and Goya? The answer

once arises is that there is a total lack of variety in the forms of the objects. The fruits are nearly all of the same size, and they seem too large in comparison with the flower pot. Kalff would have placed both large and small fruits in the composition, and there would have been one object more important than the rest, to concentrate the interest. No doubt things happen that way—but, we may ask, is it therefore necessary to paint them so? His “Apples” in the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam (Fig. 57), shows the same faults as “The Pheasants and Apples” before mentioned. While the apples themselves are well painted, they have the size of melons compared with the trees which serve as a background. One large yellow apple looks like a large quince.

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was a realist of the truthful sort who never flattered. He dared to paint not only what he saw, but what he knew was there. Thus he stripped his sitters of their disguise. In the whole gallery of royal portraiture where can we find as truthful a picture of a king as Velasquez' Philip IV? As Velasquez shows him, he is not an inch a king. I doubt if there is any portrait like it for frankness, unless it be Goya's Charles IV.

Manet, too, loved to tear the mask from society, in a word, to shock, as he did occasionally, as in his "Olympia." This work is undoubtedly reminiscent of Goya's nude "Maja." Velasquez' influence is most strongly felt in Manet's "Boy with a Sword" in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. The full length pose, the plain neutral background, the brushwork all recall the Spanish master.

This stress on Manet's antecedents is not out of place in our study of still-life painting; it prepares us for what we may expect, for any Dutch influence, direct or indirect, would be bound to react by producing still-life pictures. Velasquez, for example impressed as he was by Hals, painted still-lives. His "bodegones," the studies of his youth, are kitchen interiors, or breakfast pieces, not far removed from the style of Dou, Metsu and Maes.

Throughout his life Manet gave still-life a prominent place in his art; this is evident not merely in his pure still-life pictures but in his figure pieces. In his early Guitarero, we will notice that down at the foot of the bench on which the singer is sitting, are two onions and a large bottle. What are they here for save to add a

touch of color and variety to a part of the picture needing it? Manet with correct artistic instinct felt that oftentimes a portrait or a figure group with its large interests, needed a few objects like a vase of flowers, some fruit, or utensils, to offset it, and by their small spots of bright color to relieve the broader surfaces. In his "Eva Gonzales," there is the greatest attention paid to the painting of the chair, the portfolio beside it, and the flower on the floor. In his "Dejeuner sur l'herbe," there is again, in one corner, a still-life group—baskets of fruit. It must be remembered that Manet called this picture "Le Bain"; the later name by which it was generally known was given because the still-life in the picture suggested a picnic scene. Manet's "Dejeuner dans l'Atelier" likewise gives this importance to still-life accessories, as do his "Père Lathuile" with a counter full of bottles, his "Bar des Folies Bergères," likewise with bottles, glasses, flasks, etc., and obviously the "Boy with a Sword," "The Woman with a Paroquet," the "Boy Blowing Soap Bubbles," and his "Portrait of Emile Zola," with Japanese prints in the background.

Duret's story of how Manet painted his portrait is illuminating on this subject. He writes:<sup>3</sup>

"In 1868 in the Rue Guyot, Manet painted my portrait. Here I had an opportunity of observing the actual working of his mind, and the processes by which he built up a picture. The portrait was of a small size and represented me standing up, with the left hand in the waistcoat pocket and the right resting on a cane. The grey frock coat which I was wearing detached itself

<sup>3</sup> "Manet and the French Impressionists," p. 66.

from a grey background—the picture thus forming a harmony in grey. When it was finished, quite successfully in my opinion, I saw that Manet was not satisfied with it. He seemed anxious to add something to it. One day when I came he made me resume the pose in which he had originally placed me, and, moving a stool near to me, he began to paint it with its garnet-colored cover of woolen stuff. Then the idea occurred to him of taking a book and putting it underneath the stool; this, too, he painted with its cover of bright green. Next he placed on the stool a lacquer tray, with a decanter, a glass and a knife. All these variously colored objects constituted an addition of still-life in a corner of the picture; the effect was wholly unpremeditated, and came to me as a surprise. Another addition which he made afterwards was still more unexpected—a lemon placed upon the glass on the little tray . . . Evidently the picture painted throughout in a grey monochrome gave him no pleasure. His eye felt the lack of pleasing colors. Thus this practice (shown in many of his other works) of placing bright tones in juxtaposition—in the luminous patches contemptuously described as patchwork—proceeded from a perfectly frank and deep-rooted instinct."

This brings us to Manet's new use of color, which distinguishes his later work, and the work of most succeeding painters influenced by him, from the older masters. Compared to him Courbet was an old master, in that he painted with the traditional chiaroscuro, obscuring his objects in brown shadow and avoiding bright colors. But Manet, whether from his own instinct, or from his

admiration of Japanese art, or from his contact with the *plein-airism* of Manet, gradually came to feel that the greatest aesthetic pleasure was derived from color.

It would be deviating too far afield to go into a discussion of the new use of color by Manet and the impressionists. Sufficient for us is the fact that from this time on modern painting makes a complete break with the past; objects are taken out of their dark studio corners, enveloped as they were in brown shadow, and placed in the light where their bright and rich colors can be enjoyed for themselves.

Manet's "Peonies" in the Louvre, is a still-life study of his later years which illustrates the new method in painting still-lives. First of all it reminds one of the East. The vase and the platter on which it stands is Chinese, of a brilliant design, the lustrous white porcelain enlivened by richly colored birds and flowers. This is the new note in color, the lustrous, the gorgeous—and the vase does not stand in the dark shadow of an old master, but in a bright, broad light. More splendid are the great peonies, which take up the whole rest of the picture, forming a decorative pattern not unlike a Chinese design. The petals are painted with the loose, free, impressionistic strokes Manet derived from Hals, so that the whole picture has a freshness that should belong above all else to flowers.

That Manet was interested in the art of the Far East is well known. Though this interest did not affect so much the character of his art as it did that of Whistler, we find Chinese and Japanese details of design often introduced. His love for peonies—of which he did sev-

eral still-lives—was perhaps due to his admiration for oriental design. One of his flower pieces, with roses and irises, in the Duret collection, Paris, shows a vase on which is painted a dragon. Often times these flowers have light grey backgrounds—the neutral tone of which gives them a suggestion of the Chinese or the Japanese. It is easy to imagine how very different such still-lives are from any painted according to the Dutch tradition.

But Manet's versatility in still-life painting led him to great variety in choice of subject and treatment. The catalogue by Duret<sup>4</sup> reveals the fact that he painted at least three canvases of fish, two of oysters, one of a ham, three of "Pears," one entitled simply "Raspberries," another "Plums," and two of "Peaches," while he made several small studies of lemons, apples, and melons. That simple individual objects were represented is shown by his picture of "A Bottle"; game he painted also, as in his "Rabbit" and "Hare." Flowers, however, are the most numerous in the list.

Some of his still-lives recall Claesz or Heda, as in the "Oysters" of the Pau Gallimard collection, Paris, where there is a plate shown with six opened oysters, other oysters on the table with a sliced lemon, and a china pepper shaker, with a fork. Professor Mather of Princeton possesses a Manet which reminds one of a Chardin in the Louvre as well as some work of the Haarlem painters (Fig 58). It represents a table, with the inevitable cloth, and a collection of bottles, porcelain and other ware. It is not in the least impressionistic, being delicately smooth in its brushwork. But the cool grey

<sup>4</sup> "Manet and the French Impressionists," Appendix 1.

## POTS AND PANS

luminosity of the work is distinctly Manet. Even more like the Haarlem painters in arrangement is his "Melons, Quinces and Grapes."<sup>5</sup> On a table partly covered by a white cloth are the melons on a plate, the quinces on another plate, a bottle, a glass, and a bunch of grapes. But the treatment is unlike any Dutchman's. The picture is equally illumined, with no deep shadows, the light being distributed evenly over the objects. The interest centres in the color contrasts, and the subtle color tones of the white cloth, the fruits and the high reflections of the bottle. The artist seems to have sought brilliancy of effect—luminosity, rather than delicacy, and there is a lack of decorative quality that a still-life should possess. Sometimes mere freedom of technique interested him, as in his fluid "Fish" in the Durand-Ruel Collection. Manet is seldom decorative, except by accident. His neutral backgrounds against which he places his light spots, assist in giving his canvases a decorative quality; the flatness of his tones also adds to it; but it is not apparent that Manet studied line and spacing—interesting variety in forms or contrasts of light and shade as part of a design.

But Manet has placed succeeding generations of still-life painters in his debt by showing the aesthetic value of color in and for itself, the keen emotions that can be aroused by pure pigment, and the joy that can be derived from clear light and brightness.

<sup>5</sup> Reproduced in Heineman's "French Artists of Our Day," pl. XXII. Collection not given.

## FRENCH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

### IV

#### FANTIN-LATOUR, 1836-1904

The name of Fantin-Latour is often linked with that of Manet. It was Fantin who painted the celebrated portrait of Manet, in 1861, and Manet's portrait occurs again in Fantin's "Hommage à Delacroix" of 1864, as well as in Fantin's "Un atelier aux Batignolles," of 1870. Both painters exhibited in the historic Salon de Refusés of 1863. Naturally they were friends. But Fantin, being a lesser genius, was influenced by the other. He attained his reputation by his Salon picture of the "Atelier aux Batignolles," which, aside from its interest as a collection of portraits of famous revolutionaries in art, was appreciated for its fine grey tonality and its naturalism.

Fantin never aimed for the bold effects of Manet. It was as if his sensitive spirit feared the light of the blazing sun, and was more content in the softened light of the studio. He was influenced by such pictures of Manet's as the "Eva Gonzales," "The Boy with the Sword," "The Woman with a Paroquet," and those with grey or neutral backgrounds, quiet cool tones, and subdued color schemes.

Fantin-Latour was a genius of so quiet a refinement, and so subtle a charm that he attracted, and still attracts but little attention from the art-loving public. Courbet, Manet, and later Cézanne, shocked; therefore they were famous. But search the histories for Fantin-Latour, and what a scanty paragraph he occupies! He is a painter for the connoisseurs, and therefore, if you

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search the essayists—the writings of such discriminating critics as Geffroy, Proust or Léonce Bénédite, it is surprising, and yet not so—how thoroughly he satisfies them.

He painted, besides portraits, allegories, nudes and figure subjects of every description. In his allegories he was most individual. An enumeration of his works would include almost as many of this class of picture as of still-lives. His "Andromeda" of the salon of 1898, and his "Undine" and "Bathers" of the same year awakened high praise. In such works he displayed a fancy combined with naturalism that is indeed rare. Geffroy is never stinted in his praise of Fantin. He writes, "One would almost be able to apply in its entirety the verse of Baudelaire to the conception of this painter-poet who was possessed with the harmonies of line, of color, and of musical rhythm:

‘One to the other, the forms, the colors and the  
sounds respond.’"<sup>6</sup>

One of the reasons why Fantin is so much admired by those who know, is, that he was purely an artist, with a perfect taste. Far more discriminating than most of his contemporaries who pursued certain theories in art regardless of all else, he understood that tradition in art had a forcefulness that could never be replaced by what was new, yet at the same time he appreciated what was new in his own day, and selected from it. What he desired above all else in a picture was unity and naturalism. For that reason his pictures are always restful, and one turns to them with relief after the highly emo-

<sup>6</sup> La Vie Artistique, 4-284.

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tional experience which one so often has witnessing an exhibition of late nineteenth century art.

Fantin's talent is seen at its best in his still-lives, for in these simple compositions, often so quaintly arranged, he develops a style that is distinctly his own.

The number of these pictures is prodigious. During his career he must have painted several hundred. In Flourys' "Catalogue de l'œuvre complet de Fantin-Latour" of 1911, it appears that in 1872 he painted no less than forty-eight still-lives, most of them flowers; in 1873, seventy-seven, in 1874, thirty-one, in 1875, the same years as his masterpiece portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Edwards, twenty-six.

To describe one of his still-lives is to describe many of them; there are dozens which differ scarcely at all in general effect. One who has seen many of his canvases in various private collections, carries away the impression that they are quite uniform in style. For what he does is simply to paint a bouquet of flowers, of various kinds, in a vase against a grey background. There are several which the writer has seen in private and public collections in Holland, France, and America. They all had the following arrangement: against a grey or grey-blue background, light or dark, perfectly plain—table or support being vaguely suggested—a vase or a basket filled with many flowers, sometimes tightly compressed like an old-fashioned bouquet; sometimes loosely and freely arranged, a motley of roses, carnations, poppies, blue bells or larkspur and verbenas mixed in with their green leaves; or simply various kinds of roses, red and white and pink—almost any combination of flowers, pro-

viding there was a sufficient variety of color (Fig. 59).

Some of Fantin's still-lives are not such simple vases of flowers as I have described. There is one with a basket of roses, more loosely arranged than most, with a glass bowl of poppies behind, but placed with charming simplicity against the neutral background.<sup>7</sup> Nor are all of his compositions flower-pieces, for there is one which represents a basket of ferns, with grapes on a table, nothing else.<sup>8</sup>

Descriptions like these do not indicate the charm which the pictures actually possess; tightly bunched bouquets of red, pink and blue do not suggest decoration nor much originality in arrangement. But it must be remembered that against a neutral background almost any color scheme will work. That is why a Fantin is never crude. No matter how exciting the motley of red and pink and purple may appear, the surrounding grey gives rest. So that his vase of flowers is like a rich jewel against the velvet of a woman's dress, or a stained glass window within the gloom of a cathedral. The flowers are as vibrant sparkles of light out of the sombreness of a dull sky. This is the secret of Fantin-Latour, and this is why Geffroy could write, "The smallest canvas of Fantin-Latour is a scheme where nothing is lacking to constitute a definite decoration."

But more must be said. Within the burst of splendor there is far more refinement, arrangement, display of taste than is at first apparent. The colors will appear to arrange themselves so that the whites, the salmons and

<sup>7</sup> Reproduced in "L'oeuvre de Fantin-Latour, Recueil de cinquante Reproduction." Léonce Bénédite, Paris, 1906, from the Rosenburg collection.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. From the Belvalette Collection.



FANTIN LATOUR, STUDY IN FLOWERS  
TATE GALLERY, LONDON



the pinks of roses will group together, forming a conspicuous mass and the chief point of interest in the picture. The warmest tones, the reds, the yellows, and the oranges will be nearest the centre; and, as the bouquet curves around and over, the violets and the blues will be found. Separating them yet unifying them, are the green leaves. These colors, therefore, have not fallen so, like bits of sparkle in a kaleidoscope, but they were placed so by a luminist who understood the rules of color vibration and of harmony. And it is apparent that this is the new colorism—not that of the old masters—but of Manet, cool, bright, pure and lustrous, enveloped not in shadow, but in a clear atmosphere and light. Nevertheless there is no impressionism in his handling; every flower is carefully studied. Its individual form and texture is preserved yet not too detailed to destroy its freshness. For this reason Fantin's flowers are more satisfactory than Manet's. The latter, while trying to preserve the freshness of his flowers by impressionistic handling, neglected their texture and their form; in short, his flowers lack that exquisiteness which only the greatest refinement can produce. The art of flower-painting makes certain stringent demands: to obtain that ineffable texture, whether it be crisp or soft, but always delicate, requires a patience combined with dexterity that very few painters in the whole history of art have possessed. Of the hundreds of flower painters, men and women, who thought and still think that flower painting is a refuge for the artist *manque*, one can count on his left hand the number who have succeeded.

Fantin succeeded, but it would be superficial praise

to adulate his art without being aware of his shortcomings. Often his flower-pieces seem over-studied. As a painter of the textures of flowers, he does not satisfy in every case. Certainly in this respect he will have to take second place beside Lafarge. And, too, in spite of Geffroy, one feels that the artist is not a great decorator. His forms are often too small, there is not sufficient largeness—not sufficient interesting contrast of large masses against small which the Chinese and Japanese knew so well how to employ. Decorative Fantin's still-lives may be, but in the sense that a bit of jewelry is decorative, and they remind one most of the mosaic brooches of the late Victorian age.

## V

## VOLLON, 1833-1900

Vollon was a reincarnation of a seventeenth century Dutchman. While Manet was merely affected by a painter like Franz Hals, who was after all essentially modern, Vollon went right over to the little masters of Amsterdam and Haarlem. He seems to have been but slightly influenced by the impressionist movement, and therefore he has fared badly at the hands of critics of modern art. Some have gone so far as to say that he is not to be looked at in company with Manet, for in a natural world that loves out-of-door life with its radiance and glory, he preferred the brown gloom of the studio interior. Others in comparing him with Fantin-Latour, contemptuously allude to his profusion of fish and oysters as if these things were of a lower order than flowers,

although Volland did flowers, too. On the other hand, there are those who concede that he is the greatest painter of still-life since Chardin, and one of the most accomplished painters of the nineteenth century.

To admirers of still-life painting criticism of Volland on the grounds that he belongs to the past, rather than to the present, will always fall upon deaf ears. He paints dead salt-water fish like Abraham van Beyeren—good; grapes and crystal goblets like Kalff—so much the better! Dead game like Franz Snyders and Fyt—excellent! And butcher shops like Rembrandt and Teniers—what better could he do?

Volland, Bonvin, Ribot, and Philippe Rousseau are four names that rush to our lips together when we think of still-life painting in France in the last century. Blaise-Desgoffe is a fifth—but let us not spoil our series. These four are kindred spirits—all Dutch in the same enigmatical sense that Chardin was. Bonvin is the example of the humility that should always be the lot of a still-life painter, dealing as he must do with humble things. A realist, the most he attempted was to picture the life and the things which interested him. In his visits to the Louvre, and later to Holland, he discovered that he belonged to the company of Chardin, Vermeer, Metsu and de Hoog,—painters of familiar genre, who were not inspired by the merely anecdotal but by the picturesque. Bonvin's still-lives began in the kitchen, with the cooks—French ones, however—and their pots and pans, hence his pictures have the subdued lighting of indoors with deep shadows (Fig. 62).

Ribot's beginning was no less humble. Poverty-

stricken, he was forced to work in his spare hours at night; hence his darkened interiors. Accustomed to this scheme, it was natural that he should turn to the artificial lighting of Rembrandt and the Spanish Ribera, but he was equally influenced by Hals, Steen and Metsu. His old woman "Keeping Accounts" is reminiscent of several genre painters from Quentin Matsys to Rembrandt. In his early pictures he reminds one of Pieter Aertz as well as Teniers, the Dutch painters of cooks plucking poultry, stirring soup, and cleaning their pots and pans. In his picture of fish in the Ryks Museum of Amsterdam he is as fine as van Beyeren.

Philippe Rousseau was purely a still-life painter, and in this branch an artist of higher aims, for he used his still-life for splendid decorative compositions, and loved the more luxurious things of life. He was a second Hondekoeter in his large decorations of birds, poultry and wildfowl, another Snyders or Fyt in his compositions of dead game; in his groups of fruit, lobsters, oysters and fish he was de Heem returned to life, while in his rich arrangements of Chinese porcelain, precious objects, fruits and dainties, it was as if Kalff had never died. While it may be said he was not original, yet he was not a servile imitator of the Dutch. Compositions so naturally conceived are not produced by imitation, nor coloring so powerful and clear. He, after all, has the freshness of a modern, and a rich, if deep, tonality which could only be produced from original observation. There is a picture by him in the Wilstach Collection of Philadelphia.

Vollon, while belonging to this group, was by no means

a mere Dutchman. He may have re-incarnated from the Low Countries—but then Watteau was Flemish born. There is something of the lyrical, the fantastic about him as there was about Watteau. Many of his pictures are scenes of that poetic world where Pierrot and Pierrette live their unreal life of tragic comedy.

And as a landscapist Vollon is no less poetic. A farm-yard scene of his in the Metropolitan Museum is rich in quality. Not of the *plein-air* school, it is less a bit of accurate observation of effect of light than it is an expression of the beauty which the scene revealed. There are landscapes by him which recall the Barbizon manner of Theodore Rousseau.

It is something for which we may be profoundly thankful that through Vollon the old Dutch masters did not die in the seventeenth century. Had it not been for him, and Ribot, Bonvin, Philippe Rousseau, we would never have known what the old Dutchmen would have been like if they had lived in France. For Vollon, like Chardin, is after all French. Compare him to the Germans, Leutze, Robbe, Grube or Preyer—one can do that in the New York Library—and one will understand. These men too, go obviously back to the Dutch school, but what stupidity of composition! What death in coloring! Even Munkacsy, who lived in France, had nothing of Vollon's spirit.

Vollon's still-life in the New York Public Library entitled "Mappemonde" is one of his important works. Exhibited in the Universal Exposition of 1900 it received the grand prix. It shows us a library setting; on a carved library table are old books, papers, writing ma-

terials, candlesticks and a geographical sphere. The background is neutral. The whole is well lighted, with a concentration of effect upon the important objects, and the objects are grouped into interesting relationships of shape and size, and the coloring rich and deep. This, it seems, is by no means one of Vollon's best still-lives, but it strikes one forcibly in contrast to the other still-lives in the Public Library. A Desgoffe in the same collection is an interesting contrast. Desgoffe, of whom Geffroy wrote, "There are existences which have truly touched the bottom of boredom," is here true to himself. It is a canvas showing objects of art used by Marie Antoinette. It is indeed a collection of dead things: a harp, a clock, Louis XVI furniture, vases—frightful atrocities, costly but ugly—the coloring is a clash between yellows and pinks.

Desgoffe—how thankful too, we are of thee—example as thou art of all that still-life painting never ought to be! He would have been far better the illustrator of a catalogue of French antiquities. Another picture of his in the Luxembourg—why it is perpetuated no one knows—shows a collection of sixteenth century curios: a rock crystal vase, a purse of Henry II, an enamel by Jean Limousin. It is not worth a kettle by Antoine Vollon—perfect imitation of the objects that it is. His pictures express nothing—his objects have no beauty—no matter how precious—for they have no color, no light or shade, no texture—microscopic in accuracy though they be.

This little digression is not unwarranted for the art of Blaise-Desgoffe is worth remembering as a warning.



ANTOINE VOLLOON, FRUIT AND FLOWERS  
TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART



His pictures, however, should be taken down from the art galleries and put in the show cases where curios are kept.

Vollon seems to be best remembered for his fish. A canvas in the Luxembourg shows us two fish against a dark background, lying on a table. The wetness, the scaliness—the slimyness of these fish is unsurpassable. But this is not enough—it is a rich harmony from deep tones. Chase undoubtedly drew inspiration from such a picture in his remarkable still-lives of fish.

Of his pots and pans with vegetables, in the tradition of Chardin, there are many excellent examples. One of the best is in the T. G. Arthur Collection, Scotland, entitled "Plums."<sup>9</sup> On a rough table there is a large copper kettle, an earthen jug, and a glass; the plums are in the foreground. One can visualize readily enough the rich coloring of the picture with its happy combination of coppers, ochres, deep greys and purples.

The Toledo Museum possesses an example of his flowers, with fruit (Fig. 60). It is one of the most impressionistic of his pictures, painted boldly with free fluid strokes—there is nothing hard, dry or tight about it, and in such a picture Vollon shows himself to have been a true modern. On a table is a large silver repoussé urn, loosely filled with roses and other flowers, some of which have fallen out on the table. On a plate nearby are some oranges and a knife, and behind, a decanter and a glass. For brilliancy, for luminosity, this rivals Manet. In design it closely approaches the Japanese.

<sup>9</sup> Exhibited in the Glasgow Int. Ex. Reproduced by MacColl, "Nineteenth Century Art," p. 148.

In the Louvre there is another example of his still-life of fruit, this time as a breakfast piece. On a table, with a curtain background, there is a white porcelain plate of peaches and grapes, with grape leaves; behind there is a tall vase and a high champagne glass. The composition is exceedingly rich in design and color, and is brilliantly lighted.

Of an entirely different character is the Volland in the Ryks Museum, Amsterdam, of a red earthen crock with flowers (Fig. 61). It shows with what simple materials the artist could produce a decorative work. This is a small picture, but many of his are on a large scale. In a private collection in America there is an immense canvas of growing asters with carnations. They appear to be out of doors. One can well imagine what a sumptuous effect the artist has produced with these white and purple asters, with the red carnations sparkling in their bed of green leaves.

Volland can be studied in the Wilstach Collection in Philadelphia where there is another large picture with a bouquet of flowers lying on a table.

## VI

## CEZANNE, 1839-1906

Cézanne, the mysterious! He has been dead for more than a decade, and still his place in the history of art is in doubt. No longer scorned—he gained serious consideration long before he died—he is now acclaimed by the Independents as the leader of a new movement in art, the father of the art of the future, while less revo-



FRANCOIS BONVIN, STILL-LIFE  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM



ANTOINE VOLNON, FLOWERS  
RYKS MUSEUM, AMSTERDAM





lutionary painters and critics look upon him as an abnormal genius, gifted, sincere, but untrained and experimental, whose notoriety is due in the main to the noise the Post-Impressionists have made.

Mysterious indeed he is. His life is as much a mystery as his art. Unduly sensitive to criticism, he fled the city and sought isolation in his provincial Aix in Southern France. It was granted him by an all too willing public, and while this mildest-mannered of men worked obscurely and painfully at his experiments, his enemies branded his work as that of a dangerous person—an anarchist.

Cézanne's artistic development was a curious succession of revolts. Untrained in any academy or school of art, for he began his career in his father's bank, he tried to learn by himself. The years that should have been spent in the study of drawing, he spent in the study of law. He could have made these up, but from the first he scorned the academicians and the classicists to such an extent, that he deliberately ignored drawing. He had ideas of his own about painting which prevented him from learning much from others, but it was natural at the start for him to be subject to influence. The first painter to influence him was Delacroix, then came Courbet, then Manet. So that his early enthusiasms followed the succession of revolutions that occurred in art during the nineteenth century. Later he was much influenced by Pissarro, Monet and the *Plein-Airists*, with whom he exhibited in 1874. From this time on he employed the brightest colors, and sought the greatest gamut that his palette could afford. But in the latter

part of his career he was a pure independent, discarding every influence.

This was what he was after—to cast aside every pre-conceived theory—every tradition that bound the art of painting. He attempted, therefore, the impossible. If we, if any one of us who attempts anything in the creative realm of art, should endeavor to shut our eyes to the past, even to the surrounding present of civilization, what would be our problem? We would have to forget everything we ever knew. We would have to return to our childhood, or to remain a child. We would be forced to relinquish our philosophy, which unconsciously each one builds for himself, wipe out from our brains every memory of books we had read, every impression of pictures we had seen. In other words, we would have to take the point of view of a savage.

And yet what would we not give for this childlike vision? How often, sophisticated mortals that we are, would we not give all that we possess for this *naïveté*? Cézanne's pictures sometimes seem to show us this—and therein is the chief element of their charm.

Whether it is landscape or the figure which Cézanne represents, it is landscape or the figure as primitive man would see it. His canvases never reflect nature or mankind as any previous painter has seen them. Therefore they are so strange. His biographer states that Cézanne would work for days before a canvas, out of doors or in the studio, studying the landscape or the thing before him, trying to understand its structure, its form, trying to picture it on canvas as a form, a solid mass. Oftentimes his experiment was left unfinished. Oftentimes

the same thing was painted over and over again. He never ceased his struggle to paint what he considered the reality, the elemental form which the outward appearance enveloped. As any earnest student knows, this search for that which is within is well nigh fruitless.

Maurice Denis, his admirer, admits, "It is a touching spectacle that a canvas of Cézanne presents, generally unfinished, scraped with a palette knife, scored over with *pentimenti* in turpentine, many times repainted with an *impasto* that approaches actual relief. In all this evidence of labor, one catches sight of the artist in his struggle for style and his passion for nature. . . . Let us admit that it (this struggle) gives rise sometimes, with Cézanne, to chaotic results."<sup>10</sup>

In many respects Cézanne was a drudge; had he possessed more imagination his results would have come more easily. That he lacked imagination was one of his greatest handicaps.

When Maurice Denis painted his "Hommage à Cézanne" in 1901, thus raising the new master to the same rank as Delacroix and Manet, it was a still-life picture that was placed on Cézanne's easel. As a still-life painter Cézanne is beyond doubt most justly famous (Figs. 63 and 64). The character of an apple is perhaps less difficult to discern than that of a countryside or a bit of human nature. His still-lives are universally accepted today as his best works. "Chardin is the only modern still-life painter that can be compared to him—not Manet, Volland or Chase," is the opinion of Huneker. It is questionable whether most of us will agree to that.

<sup>10</sup> Burl. Mag. Jan.-Feb., 1910, tr. by Roger E. Fry.

I am reminded of a still-life by Cézanne which represents a table, covered with a white cloth on which are a wineflask, a goblet, an earthen jar, some apples and a knife. The background is plain save for three four-pointed stars like a pattern on the wallpaper. My description recalls perhaps, a breakfast piece by Claesz or Heda, Chardin or Manet—but it is unlike any by these men. The wine flask is misshapen, the tablecloth is crumpled up in a slovenly way. There is no arrangement nor design. There is no particular scheme of lighting nor of color. Perhaps its lack of design is what obtrudes itself most conspicuously, for the artist's love of literal truthfulness led him to paint things as they occurred—going a step further than Courbet. He painted all the accidents in the things in front of him, whereas any other painter would have left them out as not contributing to the decorative effect.

This is a glaring inconsistency in his art, for, we may well ask, if he discarded literal resemblance to form, why not eliminate also unnecessary elements in a composition? But when we consider Cézanne's coloring we come for the first time to the principal force in the picture, for these yellows, greens, whites, blues and browns are the words Cézanne used to express his realization of the objects. It is with these that the painter tries to produce volume and substance. These qualities his objects have—the glass, transparency with cylindrical roundness, the apples rotundity, the jar mass. "There is no such thing as line," said Cézanne, "no such thing as modelling. There are only contrasts, when color attains

its richness, form attains its plenitude."<sup>11</sup> It is true, what is so often said, that Cézanne's forms are solid, one can look around them. That is why he places purples or blues where he does, or reds and yellows, not because these are the local colors, but because these colors placed as they are give the effect of solidity or mass which he desired. We notice, too, that some of his objects—the jar, the plate, have heavy black outlines around them, while others, like the tablecloth, the glass, have none. These accentuations, or lack of them, have the same purport as the color—to give the proper mass. And finally we wonder at the apparently careless way in which the color is applied, the pigment thick in places, the canvas almost bare in others. This process also adds in giving the effect of relative mass or substance as well as shimmering effect like mosaic.

There are the greatest discrepancies between the works of Cézanne because of the experimental character of so many of them. An example of failure in every respect is a still-life of his with a table on which is a large shell, a vase and a cup and saucer, in a room where there is a large clock against the wall. The glass vase, the cloth on the table, the shell, and the clock are all equally fuzzy and look as if they were made of wool. Of course no one need believe that a picture must have "finish" to be complete. Cézanne has been roundly criticized because of the unfinished state of his pictures. *Qu'importe?* A picture, however, must be carried far enough to give the objects their especial character—that character which Cézanne himself so emphasized. If a china

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from E. Bernard.

cup has the same texture as a tablecloth, the elemental character of these objects is lost.

Many of Cézanne's still-lives are of apples or other fruit, in plates and dishes, on a table, which is generally covered with a cloth, all against a background of a complex character, gay wall paper, or the interior of a room. A good example is in the Christiania Museum. There is a luxury of color about these pictures that is truly delightful. Thick and pure, rich and gay, they are not softened by any intervening atmosphere. Subtle effects of sunlight, flickering rays or stray beams never dance capriciously about them. Apples are green, tablecloths are white, and that is all there is to be said. You must like them as you like the gaudy garments of a negro, or the gay blankets of a Navajo.

Perhaps one of Cézanne's best still-lives is in the Berlin National Gallery. It is less chaotic than most of his, in fact an orderly arrangement, unified, well-balanced and concentrated. On a small table partly covered by a crumpled white cloth, is a ginger jar filled with various flowers. On the tablecloth are a few pears. All the objects are well drawn. The background is unobtrusive. One feels that it is accomplished.

The plastic quality of Cézanne's objects has often been insisted upon, but I do not believe the aesthetic value of his picture depends upon this. Their plastic quality is evident only to those who understand Cézanne's special symbolism of receding and advancing colors. It is therefore an intellectual and not an aesthetic enjoyment which, in this respect, they give. They have, of course, no design—no decorative quality, as

none was intended. As for the backgrounds, they are not back of the objects, for the distortions in perspective often make the distant objects jump out of place.

There is one *nature morte* of Cézanne's with a collection of pots and plates and a growing plant on a table covered with a white cloth. The table is a rough affair—a common white kitchen table. Chardin would have seen its beauty. Cézanne saw its ugliness. The table-cloth is a crumpled mass. Chardin, like the Dutchmen, saw in a kitchen towel a surface for the subtle play of delicate lights and shadows; Cézanne treats his linen like so much plaster fallen from the ceiling. Only to this extent is it plastic. His pots and pans are interesting as masses, but they annoy one by their shapelessness. The flower in the flower pot seems made of colored clay—a sculptor's sketch. All these objects are seen, apparently, from above. Behind them, in the picture, is the floor of the room, with a bit of stretcher lying on the floor, and behind that the wainscoting of the wall. Most of this is superfluous material which detracts from the unity of the picture.

The above-described canvas is undoubtedly a study of planes, horizontal or vertical, receding or advancing. This brings us to the question, is such a representation an end, an aim in art? What is the aesthetic value of volume and mass in art? Of mere plastic quality?

Let us admit that these things have their importance, but the pleasure which is derived from these is not a purely aesthetic one.

There are so many other things that are more important—things of the spirit. Cézanne's art is plainly

materialistic, concerned with experiments of a purely materialistic kind. His experiments, his theories have led to abstract discussions of new quasi-scientific theories. His art has led to cubism, futurism, symbolism, and what not. We admire Cézanne's sincerity, his hard work, his powerful daring. We admire, too, his struggle for the expression of what he considered reality. But had he sought the reality which lies beyond matter—that reality which is seen with the imagination—by the spiritual eye—he could not have been the Frenhofer that he was.

He has been called a Fauve. It is not a bad name. He was a man to whom it should have been said, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength," an admonition applicable to all the *Fauves* in art.

## VII

### IMPRESSIONISM AND POST-IMPRESSIONISM IN FRENCH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

The work of Eduard Manet prepared us for that of his contemporary, Claude Monet. With the former we became accustomed to a new vision—we learned to see color, vivid color, in mass. With the latter we learn to see light, scintillating, vibrating light. "Plein-airism" has now become accepted as a principle, and we can hardly realize that the pictures of Monet were once tests upon one's eyesight, at a time when the eyes of most people were used only to studio darkness.

Still-life painting was not the interest to Monet that it was to Manet, to Fantin-Latour or to Cézanne.



CLAUDE MONET, STILL-LIFE



Manet had the Dutchman's love for the surface value of objects; Fantin-Latour the instinct for the spiritual value of fruit or of flowers; Cézanne sought but did not find the hard reality of the commonplace. Monet, however, pursued the light that played about things. For this reason he is chiefly a landscapist. But he painted a few still-lives of extraordinary charm.

We cannot be too grateful to Monet. Never again can painters refuse to see the brightness and glory of light itself. "Beauty," said Plotinus two thousand years ago, "is a light that plays about things. It does not consist in the things themselves," and while the great masters of painting felt this instinctively throughout the centuries, its full meaning was not realized until Monet revealed it (Fig. 65).

Monet's still-lives are visions of light and color, given form. They are not colored forms lighted from without. Herein lies the great distinction between his art and the art of luminists of previous epochs. Like his landscapes, they seem to be snatches of a scene, caught while a shower of multi-colored rays burst down upon them. I recall a basket of fruit upon a table, with melons, apples and grapes scattered about. It was a decoration in the sense that a well-ordered garden of yellow, white and purple flowers is a decoration, because rich in design and color. But it was more than that, it was a revelation of a new emotion which light and color can give.

Among the many modern painters of France who have been influenced by the impressionism of Manet

and Monet, Emil Jacques Blanche is conspicuous as a still-life painter. In his portraiture sometimes his interest in still-life accessories overreaches his interest in his sitter. In nearly all of his canvases it is evident he loves to introduce lacquer screens, bowls of flowers, ornamental objects and the furnishings of his rooms. Sometimes he paints interiors without figures. We cannot say that there is much decorative design in these pictures. He paints what he sees without sufficient selection so that his interiors seem crowded. But brilliant and colorful they are beyond description.

He has also painted pure still-lives, generally with great masses of flowers (Figs. 66 and 67). In composition they recall some of the still-lives of Courbet and of Vollon. In other respects, however, they are impressionistic. Executed in his *premier coup* manner, they are fresh, spontaneous and luminous, if lacking in design.

An interesting modern art is that of Mme. Sybil Meugens. Her pictures could never have been painted before the time of Manet, Fantin-Latour and the influence of the Japanese. They are first of all arrangements of objects choice and beautiful in themselves—Chinese vases, Japanese carvings, rich embroideries and *objets d'art*. With these she combines flowers into a composition which is clearly Japanese with its contrast of packed detail against open spacing. All this is broadly handled with an understanding of the value of pure paint flowing from a full brush backed by a firm hand. There is a very close resemblance between her work and a few of our American women still-life painters.



J. E. BLANCHE, BLUE HYDRANGEAS



J. E. BLANCHE  
WHITE PEONIES, LUSTRE JUG, AND RED LACQUER BOX





## FRENCH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

Thus far we have not discussed the influence of Cézanne upon recent still-life painting. Whatever may be thought of this influence, it has been considerable and cannot be ignored. One of the serious painters to be influenced by independent theories is Felix Vallotton. He was at one time associated with Gauguin, Maurice Denis and the Pont-Aven school. Although an independent, we can hardly term him an ultra modern; he has not revolted from the historic traditions of painting. He suddenly became known a few years ago for his portraits and interiors engraved on wood with great simplicity and decorative quality.

As far as I have been able to study his work, his still-life paintings impress me as the most decorative things he has done. Their simplicity approaches closely the flower studies of Fantin-Latour, for he shows a perfect knowledge of design, of the principle of selection. Yet they are bolder in color than Fantin's, very fluidly painted, clear and bright. Vallotton is an example of the modern French artist who, being thoroughly familiar with Post-Impressionist movements, and sympathetic with them, prefers to cling to what is good in the old while embracing what is virile in the new. His art is a reproof to mannerism and eccentricity.

Eduard Vuillard is a painter of interiors like those of Pierre Bonnard, except that Vuillard's interiors are extremely quiet and simple. There may or there may not be figures introduced; if so, they are treated like still-life objects; and sometimes Vuillard does pure still-life studies, groups of mere objects. He approaches Cézanne more closely than any other Independent and has

little in common with the violent revolutionary tendencies of men like Matisse. His independence consists in a matter of fact disregard for drawing; but distortion of objects is not with him an end in itself. One of his still-life interiors is in the Luxembourg and is called "At Luncheon." It shows an intimate picture of a lower class home; there is no finesse, no love for prettiness, no sentiment. There is, however, in its patchworklike coloring the same decorative result that Cézanne obtained by his mosaic technique. Such pictures seem like sketches of a gifted colorist to be used later in a finished picture, yet Vuillard intends no more than to suggest.

Vallaton and Eduard Vuillard are claimed by the revolutionists in art as members of their cult. It is true both men are sympathizers of this movement, and their association with Bonnard, Maurice de Vlaminck and others has added to their revolutionary reputation. But Vuillard should be termed a protestant, which nowadays is a much more respectable name.

It is always difficult for the art historian to be appreciative of the new art movements (should they be so-called?) of his own times. His historic viewpoint tends to make him judge by traditional standards. And yet his studies should clearly teach him that during the centuries every reform was of the nature of a revolution, perhaps slow and peaceful, but oftentimes painful. There were always conservative elements entrenched as upholders of an older order, against which the progressives had to fight. During the last century these changes, protestations, revolts, reforms—whatever one chooses to

call them—occurred with such ever increasing rapidity that the art critic had scarcely time to become accustomed to one revolution when a new one began.

The two decades of this present century have introduced a series of new experiments in art. The ultra-modern movements cannot be called more than experiments, for they are attempts to introduce pure symbolism in art, to bring to a close the epoch ushered in by Giotto, and by retracing the steps of progress through the Byzantine period and through the Oriental, to return finally to the hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt.

In the meanwhile the experiments cannot but be painful to a public with an historic consciousness, for they are abrogations of the principle of life which is based upon the preservation and not upon the destruction of the accomplishments of the human race.

Symbolism, itself, is nothing new in art. When frankly professed, it may have a deep mystical meaning such as Byzantine art at its best did have. But our modern symbolists are at the same time distortionists; they suggest that symbolism implies distortionism, and in this they court criticism. It is a question whether the distortion of objects has any aesthetic value in itself. In the primitives we can condone it, for with all their misunderstanding of form, they were struggling for mastery; it is the struggle which we admire.

Henri Matisse began his career in the Ecole des Beaux Arts. At first he painted in the normal academic fashion. The French government employed him for ten years to make copies of the old masters in the Louvre. He therefore had the solid foundation de-

manded of a good artist in drawing, composition and technique. In 1913 he had a class of sixty pupils whom he made to study drawing and go through the stiff academic training which he regarded to be essential for a firm foundation.

It was while he was copying in the Louvre that Matisse discovered for himself that the classics had become a fetich. He began to feel that art needed a great change. If the present day were to produce anything original in art, he felt that painters must throw overboard the whole tradition of the past, and start over again, become again primitive.

He then became interested in the wood carvings of African negroes, the sculpture of the natives of Polynesia and Java and of the Peruvian and Mexican Indians. From them he obtained the incentive to seek a primitive vision of form and of color. He became also affected by Persian art, by the patterns and designs of the Orient. Many of his pictures show a certain amount of Oriental decorativeness. With no attempt at Naturalism, they are flat patches of color—pure, raw color—and as such they are to an extent, decorations.

One of his still-lives, exhibited at the Montross galleries in New York in 1915, shows an interior with a window through which we look out upon a city street. By the window is a table with a bowl of goldfish and a flower pot. Behind the table is a sofa with pillows, and in the extreme foreground is another table with a bowl upon it. It is very easy to tell what all these objects are. To that extent they are not symbolic, but why they are painted is a mystery, for so clumsy is the draw-

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ing, that there is no beauty to the objects. There is no perspective, no atmosphere, no light. Color, of course, there is, but it does not impress one. It appears to be the purpose of the picture to suggest or to symbolize a group of objects and it is left to the beholder's mind to picture their actual beauty.

This lack of objective beauty in the pictures of Matisse, makes one question whether this is an art for the eye. It seems rather an art for the mind. To understand these creations, one has to indulge a trifle too much in psychologic and philosophic speculation, and one is often driven to the conclusion that this is not an art at all, but a kind of science.

In 1913 James Huneker wrote, "Paris is always the prey of the *dernier cri*, and Matisse, unless he has been ousted during the last month, is not only the latest cry but we hope the ultimate scream." The distortionists individually cannot be taken seriously, but the symbolist movement, of which they form a part, will undoubtedly claim serious attention. Already out of the experiments of a few ultra-moderns there is developing a new mode of expression which is influencing and has influenced a great body of artists.

Finally, at the close of our chapter on French still-life painting we come to a group of "Independents" with whom still-lives appear to be the most popular subjects. I refer to the Cubists.

"Cubism" is a cult which professes "the joy of confining unlimited art within the limits of a single picture." A still-life picture by a Cubist is an arrangement of a number of pictures upon one canvas. The

third dimension is overcome. Let us take Pablo Picasso's "Nature Morte Espagnole" of 1912. At first sight it looks like an impression of a photographic plate which has been exposed several times, and printed in color. And so it looks at second sight and at third sight. There appear to be bottles, glasses, dumb-bells, sheets of paper, books and photographs, distorted, jumbled together and confused. In back of it all is the artistic intention to picture a multitude of impressions which these objects give him. It is true that a group of objects give one an infinite number of sensations. If seen from different angles in different lights, they vary. "Objects have not one absolute form but many." Objects also can suggest an infinite number of associations. A wine bottle suggests flowing liquor. If it can be painted corked and standing up, while at the same time open, tilted and pouring wine, there is that much more to be enjoyed.

The truth of this philosophy cannot be denied, but whether it be the province of art to record a conflict of sensations is another question.

The Cubists have no common principle which guides their work, they revolt against any system, hence their methods differ. Picasso, Metzinger, Léger, Gleizes and Picabia are the most kaleidoscopic in their results. Derain appears to be the most logical in the application of Cubist theories. His pictures are composite, that is, there is more than one visualization of the objects in them, they are "mixed images," to use a Cubist term. But he differs from most of his confrères in being comparatively simple. As a still-life painter he seems to be more interested in objects themselves and less in a men-

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tal analysis of his own sensations concerning them. In his pictures objects partly respond to one's normal perception of them. The effect is spiritistic. They are ghost pictures. Tables and flower pots are semi-invisible. We cannot conveniently see what is hidden behind or within them. But without effort we can tell that they are flower pots and tables, and for that in a Cubist picture, we must be thankful.

These Cubistic still-lives have one interest for us, in that they represent the extreme radical tendency of one wing of the revolutionary movement in art. This is their value in a history of still-life painting and they have no other.



## CHAPTER 6

CHINESE AND JAPANESE STILL-LIFE PAINTING



## CHAPTER 6

### I

#### CHINESE FLOWER PAINTING

It is, perhaps, somewhat stretching the limits of our subject to include Far-Eastern fruit and flower painting. Chinese and Japanese painting is essentially conventional, far removed in spirit from the naturalism of the West. Moreover, it employs, for the most part, growing fruits or flowers. If we make a distinction in our study of still-life painting between live and dead animals, should we not consistently make the same distinction between growing and cut flowers? Such distinctions, however, are difficult to maintain. While Chinese and Japanese artists attempted, as a rule, the representation of growing plants, yet they did a great deal of what we must term still-life painting. Whatever may be our conclusions on this point, the Far-East has exercised so great an influence on modern still-life painting in the West that the latter can hardly be understood without a knowledge of what this influence means.

We in the West have become so accustomed to admitting that what seems new and surprising to us is as old as history to the East, that we forget the significance of the admission. Of all that is vital to culture, this is especially true, and therefore true of art. Western archaeologists have been fond of pointing out, in defense of the Occident, what Chinese and Indian art owes to the Hellenistic. But Hellenistic art is a mixture itself of Asiatic and Greek elements, and if China owes anything to this art, it is because it in turn reflects the ancient Assyrian and Babylonian. Asiatic art is something peculiar to the geographic background against which it flourished, and through all the centuries of development it breathed a spirit as remote from that of European art as the nature of the Asiatic peoples is remote from that of the European.

I refer to the precociousness of eastern art because in China, as early as the Tang Dynasty, 618-906 A. D., landscape art was practiced, and appreciated for itself, indeed given a very high place in the realm of art, as it never had anywhere in the West until the nineteenth century. Not long afterward, this interest in trees and birds and flowers, grew into or led to an interest in pure flower painting or still-life.

There is always a difficulty on the part of a Westerner in understanding Chinese art. This is due, for the most part, to our ignorance of its historic background. To appreciate a French or an English painting is easy for us, for, unconsciously, we see it against its whole historic background. We are used to chiaroscuro because every picture from Masaccio down to our own

days has possessed it, more or less. We are used to a third dimension because the West has accepted Giotto's way of painting. We have our own ideas about naturalism in art, borrowed from remote classic times. So, if we are normal Westerners, not reincarnated from the East, we find it well-nigh impossible to enjoy, at first, a Chinese or Japanese work of art. We may, perhaps, appreciate its decorative qualities, but we absolutely refrain from seeking its subtle qualities of line and rhythm.

Since Whistler and Manet we have learned much, but still I believe the above statement is in the main correct.

Let us take for a challenge a painting by Ririomin (Li Lung-mien), or by Mu Ch'i (Mokkei), both artists of the best period of Chinese art—that period which set the standard for all succeeding ages, and produced a style that is reflected in the humblest fan or Japanese print. A famous painting by Li Lung-mien is his "Yuima" or Buddhist philosopher. We see him seated in abstract meditation. It seems nothing more than a drawing with no realistic surroundings of any kind. The figure is placed against the background of softly tinted paper. It has no cast shadows. The hands and face are unshaded. The wrapped figure seems like a phantom; it is not solid, it is a ghost. In truth, it is the spirit of the great philosopher. Mu Ch'i's famous "Kwannon" may be taken as another example. Again it is the symbol, this time of the serene Deity which we see. As if floating in mid-air, the figure is seated, legs crossed, upon a rock by the waterside. Her draperies, her features, are indicated merely by expressive brush

lines, in ink, upon the tinted background. The rocks, the water, are but suggested. The rest is left to our imagination.

The nearest approach we have to this kind of painting in the West is in the early Byzantine Illuminations. The work of Pollaiuolo or of Botticelli approaches it closely, but the pictures of these artists are not paintings at all, in the Western sense, but tinted line drawings. Western painting in reality shows no relation to the Chinese. The reason for this lies partly in the fundamental principle of Oriental art, far different from anything in historical European art, that art should not aim to reproduce the actual outward appearance of things, with their tactile and spacial values, volume, third dimension, etc., but to express the emotion that they create in the artist. In other words, there is a mystical idea underlying the whole matter.

If we today can understand this—it is because we live in an age which has been influenced by Japanese art. It is doubtful if a tenebrist of the Renaissance could have understood it, and certainly not a realist of the type of Courbet.

The principle was explained by the eleventh century Chinese essayist and painter Kuo Hsi. He asked, "Why is it that virtuous men love landscape painting?" He answered that it was because the phenomena of nature responded to certain needs of the human soul, and a picture of mountains and springing waterfalls, with flowers nestled in the crags, would lead men "away from the noisiness of the dusty world and the locked-in-ness of human habitations." In a word, it freed the soul.

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"A mountain is a mighty thing," he said, "hence its shape ought to be high and steep, freely disposing itself like a man at ease, or standing up with grandeur or crouching down like a farmer's boy."

"Rocks are the bones of the heaven and earth, and, being noble, are hard and deep. Rocks and forests, in paintings, should preëminently have reason. One big pine is to be painted first, called the master patriarch, and miscellaneous trees, grass, creepers, pebbles and rocks, as subjects under his supervision, as a wise man over his petty men."

These sayings, and others, prove to us how every characteristic form in nature may be compared to a state of mind, as Fenellosa writes, how, for instance, the wonderful twisted trees, mighty mountain pines and cedars, loved by these early Chinese and later Japanese, really exhibit the deep philosopher in their great knots and scaly limbs that have wrestled with storms and frosts and earthquakes, undergoing a process almost identical with man's life, struggling with enemies, misfortunes and pain. Thus nature becomes a vast and picturesque world for the profound study of character, and nature is not a subject to be copied, but to be used as material for the artist as he pleases. Why should the artist care whether his picture imitates nature if his trees are tree-like and his men manly? But philosophical considerations, alone, did not influence the form of Chinese art. The technique of Chinese painting has perhaps as much to do with it.

From the very earliest times the Chinese painted on silk and on paper, as well as on the surface of walls.

But we might say that the roll or screen of silk is to Chinese painting what canvas is to European painting. This is the surface—delicate and frail, which does more than anything else to give a unique character to Chinese art. Beautiful in itself, and costly, obviously it should not be hidden behind layers of paint. Therefore, either white or tinted, the silk should show. Upon this the brushwork is to be done—but what kind?

The analogy between Chinese writing and Chinese painting is very close, and Chinese artists have often referred to the similarity. Writing was regarded as an art. From their writing done with a brush, the Chinese developed a skill in brush work that we can hardly appreciate. Painting began with the thin brush stroke like a pen line, with ink for a medium, upon the silk. We would call it drawing, were it not for the fact that a brush was used. Then, according to the fancy of the artist, or the taste of the period in which he worked, the lines would be filled in, sometimes with pale, sometimes with rich color and gold, or with ink-washes, producing monochromes.

So it is the brush stroke that gives Chinese painting its final character; therefore it is by what the brush can do, with its fine hair line, its sweeping curves, its subtle modulations, its delicate shading upon the silk, that we must judge Chinese painting, technically. The Chinese have throughout all their history accepted the line as a convention for their art. The problem for us is to see what they did with it. Fenellosa has expressed the Chinese feeling in painting thus: "It is not things that we want in art, but the beauty of things; and if this

beauty dwells largely in their *line*, their boundaries of space, their proportions and shapes, and the unity and system of the line rhythms it is a glorious convention that can seize on just that and make supreme music out of it."

The artist who did most to make this technique the means of expression *par excellence* in China was Wu Tao Tzu, called in Japanese Godoshi, a man placed by Chinese critics "at the head of all Chinese painting ancient or modern." He flourished in the Tang Dynasty between 713-735 A. D. His name is worth noting in our study of still-life painting because he was one of the founders of monochrome painting—a style frequently used later in still-life studies. Whether he painted mystical Buddhist pictures, rich in coloring, or landscapes in black and white—he has been called the father of landscape-painting—his line had a power and a rhythm that proved the force and expressiveness of his technique to all succeeding generations. He, with his contemporary Wang Wei (Omakitsu) who was especially famous for his black and white style in landscape, did most to make landscape painting what it was in China. It was wild nature, fierce and majestic, which these ancients sought—the same nature which we in the Western world never understood until the nineteenth century.

It was not long before the development of landscape painting led to flower painting, and painting of birds and animals. This natural sequence is exactly parallel to what happened in the seventeenth century in the West.

The Dutch, the first pure landscapists, were also the first still-life painters.

Okakura in his "Book of Tea" has written very beautifully of the Chinese love of flowers. And Laurence Binyon also writes with sympathetic appreciation of the charm of Chinese flower painting. "The Chinese artist brings us to the flower," he writes, "that we may contemplate it and take from it into our souls something of the beauty of life which neither sows nor spins." As early as the tenth century in the Sung Dynasty, the Chinese possessed that poetic devotion for flowers, philosophic in many ways, which we in the West did not claim till the time of Wordsworth, Shelley, Blake and Lowell.

The so-called father of bird- and flower-painting in China was Ch'u Hui or Hsü Hsi (Joki), a man who inspired much of Japanese flower painting. He lived during the transition between the Tang and Sung dynasties, *i. e.*, in the tenth century. Besides his pictures of little birds perched on slender twigs, in full color, and of herons, he was famous for his lotus flowers which were the models for artists in later times. He painted upon coarse silk so that his line was softened, and thus his flowers, when delicately tinted, had an elusive character so much admired by both the Chinese and Japanese.

Huang Ch'uan (Kosen) was a contemporary of Ch'u Hui, of whose work there is an example or probably a copy, in the Freer Collection—a peony, remarkable for its many subtle tones of purple and pink. Li Ti and Lou Kuan were two other painters of this time who have left us exquisite designs of rose mallows.

By the eleventh century, flower painting was very

general, so that when Kuo Hsi (Kakki), whom we have quoted, wrote his essay on painting he mentions flower painting. "He that wishes to study flower painting," he said, "should put one blossoming plant in an earthen pot, and look upon it from above. He that studies bamboo painting should take one bamboo branch, and cast its shadow on a moonlight night upon a white wall."

We have a painting of black bamboo, by Bunyoka, who lived about the year 1100, which seems as if it had been painted from Kuo Hsi's prescription.<sup>1</sup> It is a landscape, but the landscape is lost in mist; across this background passes the shadow, or so it seems, of two tall, graceful bamboo branches, in simple washes, each leaf indicated by one brush stroke, so well composed and spaced that the effect is wonderfully decorative. These bamboo studies have been repeated in every age of Chinese art up to the present time. It is stated that Chinese artists spent their whole lives studying conscientiously the rhythmic movement of the bamboo stalks, as these swaying, delicate branches seemingly expressed the elusiveness of the human soul. In the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Japanese prints bamboo designs were frequently employed, the artist still inspired by the classic decorations of Kuo Hsi and Bunyoka.

When Ch'ien Shun-Chü (Shunkio) in the thirteenth century, painted his "Crumpled Camellias,"<sup>2</sup> he, too, seems to follow Kuo Hsi's advice. They are painted from above, one single plant, with one full opened flower, and two half opened, and by means of eliminating all

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced in Fenellosa, II, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Reproduced in Fenellosa, II, p. 54.

superfluous background details, he arrives at the essential character of the flower, its wax-like lustre, its decorative form, the way it joins the stem. He cares for nothing else. This is true also of the art of Wang Jo-Sui, another great flower painter of the thirteenth century. The central idea is insisted upon. I believe that the decorative quality of so much of Chinese and later Japanese art is due chiefly to this insistence upon one point in a picture, and the daring elimination of all else. The Chinese and Japanese deliberately refrained from saying all that they had to say. The background being left neutral and the accessories subdued, the effect is naturally formal and flat, and, as we know the Chinese carefully studied boundaries of space, the result is decorative.

The value of still-life painting was so well appreciated in the Sung and Yuen dynasties, which, with the Tang, formed the creative age of Chinese art, that when the Emperor Hui Tsung in the twelfth century catalogued the classes of paintings in China, out of ten kinds, four are of decorative still-life character, namely, "Dragons and Fish," "Birds and Flowers," "Ink Bamboos" and "Vegetables and Fruit."

What we learn from Chinese flower painting, and Chinese still-life in general, is first, the value of pure line; second, the decorative importance of free spaces; third, the possibility of being minute in details without slavish imitation. The Chinese artists, following Ch'u Hui (Hsu Hsi-Joki) were delicately minute, and faithful to the object they portrayed, but never did they insist on a mere reproduction of what they saw. They attended to the drawing of each petal and stamen only

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so far as their lines expressed the character of the flower. What details there were, were happily contrasted against open spaces, their compositions were creations, not imitations, in that they were studiously built up to make their decorative effect. There was nothing realistic whatever about this art, hence Chinese still-life painting is the very antithesis of European, *i. e.*, Dutch and French.

As we shall see, these principles were followed by Japanese artists and, through Japanese art, had a decided effect upon nineteenth century painting in the West.

## II

### JAPANESE STILL-LIFE

While the greatest epoch for still-life painting in Japan was the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and our chief interest lies here, it is necessary to cast a retrospective glance upon what was going on in the art world of Japan before this time.

Early Japanese art is Buddhistic, that is, essentially religious, hieratic and mystic. In the fifth century, conquered Korea—a highly civilized state, permeated with Chinese culture—turned upon her conquerors and peacefully enslaved her barbaric Japanese overlords by introducing Chinese art and the Buddhist religion into Japan. From these two sources sprang two streams of influence. Buddhism imparted a national artistic tradition to Japan; Indian, and behind them Hellenistic Greek forms were introduced, with a love for richness of effect and the use of color with gold. At the same time there

flourished alongside of the Buddhistic, the Chinese tradition of line painting which was secular rather than religious, freer, allowing greater play for individual expression. Under different names, such as Tosa and Kano, these two great movements in art continued to flourish in Japan up to modern times. It is needless to say that the Chinese line tradition was that which eventually gave rise to most of the still-life painting in Japan, although the national hieratic school also produced much decorative flower painting.

It would seem natural that there should have been a continuous mingling of the artistic culture of both the great oriental empires, but as a matter of fact at times Japan definitely cut herself off from Chinese influence, and for centuries, up until 1368, there was a complete breach between the two countries, during which period feudal Japan developed a national art—elaborate, rich and ornamental. But with the advent of the Ming Dynasty in China, and the reign of the liberal Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu—the Lorenzo de Medici of Japan—a new era commenced, when Chinese, especially Chinese Sung culture was warmly welcomed. Then the ancient hieratic tradition died out as a creative, national school, to be revived later in the seventeenth century with the decorative screen painters. The history of Japanese art shows us a series of recurrent *renaissances*, always due to Chinese influence, alternating with periods of strict isolation when Japanese nationalism asserted itself.

Josetsu, the founder of the fourteenth century Renaissance, was possibly Chinese himself; his pupil Shubun

## CHINESE AND JAPANESE STILL-LIFE PAINTING

was a Chinaman; they were both trained in China as were also their two famous followers Sesshu and Kano Masanobu. All of these men painted in Indian ink, lightly tinting their silk backgrounds, in the classic Chinese manner. It might be said that they transported Chinese art to Japan, for after this time, Chinese art as a creative force died out, while the greatest period began for Japan. In the fourteenth century countless works of Chinese art were imported to Japan—happily, as subsequently they might have been destroyed in China.

Sesshu was perhaps the most forceful, the most original master of these Chinese-trained artists. When he returned from China, he brought with him the style of the old Tang and Sung masters, force and expressiveness of line, richness of tone, subtlety in monochrome, while to these he added a quality, distinctly Japanese and at the same time his, spirit. He was more versatile in line than was possibly any Chinese painter for he could wield his brush with soft, gentle, modulating strokes—in the true painter's style, or with crisp, strong, sketchy lines like an etcher's. There is a painting on paper by Sesshu in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts of a pine branch with cherry blossoms and a pigeon. The pine needles are drawn with bold, decorative strokes, while in contrast the pigeon is delicately modelled.

Sesshu was the master of Kano Masanobu, the first of the great Kano school. Both did flowers, but Utanosuke, Masanobu's son, was preëminent in this branch of painting. His style went back to Hsu Hsi (Joki) the "father" of flower painting in the tenth century. Unlike many of the Japanese painters, but like

## POTS AND PANS

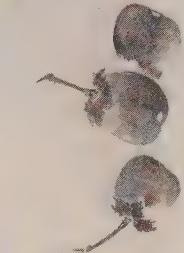
Hsu Hsi, his outlines were soft, while his color tones—often mere monochromes, were so richly, yet so delicately brushed in that his birds and flowers seemed shaded—even modelled—as solidly as any European painting.

Besides the painting of birds and flowers, true still-life painting flourished in the Ashikaga period. Fruits and vegetables were frequently painted. In the Boston Museum there are two paintings on paper, in ink, faintly tinted with color, by the sixteenth century painter Yamada Doan. One shows simply two melons, grouped together; the other, three egg plants (Figs. 68 and 69).

About the year 1600 began the Tokugawa period in Japanese art, which lasted down to 1868, during which time Japan was again shut off from foreign influence, and developed her Chinese heritage along national Japanese lines. In the seventeenth century there was a great revival of the national color style. Koyetsu was the leader of this movement. He founded a great decorative school which loved splendor, golden backgrounds, bold color schemes, and impressionistic effects. There is little of the Chinese line-tradition in this school; on the other hand it was a return to the old national ideas concerning art, rich and magnificent like the Buddhistic paintings. It was also an essentially national school in that Japanese plant forms were used in decoration, and it was *par excellence* the era for gorgeous flower compositions.

There is a screen in the Freer collection by Koyetsu, with a background of silver leaf, against which fall in true vine-like fashion, great sprays of ivy leaves in dull

YAMADA DOAN, EGG PLANT  
MIDDLE XVI CENTURY  
IN THE BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS



YAMADA DOAN, MELONS  
MIDDLE XVI CENTURY  
IN THE BOSTON MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS





red and olive and silvery green. There are no outlines; the beauty is in its pattern and arrangement.

Another screen in the Freer Collection,<sup>3</sup> by Koyetsu, is of silver, upon which in lively colors is designed what seems almost a tangle of American Indian cornstalks, with great sweeping leaves and tossing tassels. In the midst of these intertwine the stems and flowers of morning glories, and, shooting off through the maze is a large scarlet coxcomb. Even such a brief description as this conveys the richness of the composition, which no painter, save a Japanese, could have arranged in a decorative way, giving at the same time great richness of color with expressiveness of line. There is an impressionism about this work which seems extremely modern.

A companion corn screen in the Freer Collection is of gold instead of silver, upon which again are the cornstalks, morning glories, coxcombs, a marvel of contrasting colors, olive greens, reds, pale blues, pinks and yellows, so well spotted as to leave a clear and certain decorative impression. Sotatsu, a contemporary of Koyetsu, was likewise famous for his color design (Fig. 70). In this the two painters more closely approach the European conception of what painting should be, than do the followers of the line tradition. Sotatsu is considered by Japanese art critics as the greatest flower painter after Utanosuke.

There are two screens of his in Boston, in gold, with the color thickly applied in impasto over the background, without line. Other screens of the same artist are to be found in the Freer collection. Sometimes he uses dull

<sup>3</sup> Reproduced in Fenellosa, II, 124.

gold backgrounds, and color transparently washed over it, allowing the gold to show through, but, unlike Koyetsu, he is less impressionistic, being infinitely minute and delicate—preferring smaller forms. One of his screens is decorated with peonies and morning glories, mingled with their leaves and the tall blades of grasses. The background is of a pale rose color, the leaves of various hues of brown. The decoration is massed toward the lower right-hand side where three large white peony flowers stand out luminously against the background of brown and greenish leaves, while above are three other pink flowers.

Another screen of Sotatsu's represents large clumps of asters, with grasses, massed according to their color. The flowers are painted delicately but flatly in large decorative groups, with smaller clumps of poppies interspersed. The effect is both rich and elegant.

Sotatsu's drawings do much to help us understand the process of his art. Minutely complicated leaves and stems, mazes of vines, reeds and grasses of every form, tall, slender iris stalks, large elephant ears, delicate wistaria, he will contrast one against the other, these masses relieved by a plain background so that the whole panel is never covered. But standing out from the midst of these intricate mazes will be always some large flower. Thus he enriches his design with every contrasting shape and form.

Korin, who lived from 1660 to 1716, is perhaps the greatest of the impasto decorators. He is not unlike Koyetsu, painting upon gold, with naturalistic designs of flowers, plants and grasses. In the Freer collection is



SOTATSU  
POPPIES, WHEAT AND NATANE FLOWERS



a screen painted by him, of gold, designed with sprays of chrysanthemums, naturally rendered, with their stems, leaves and flowers. His iris screens for which he was especially renowned are numerous. One reproduced in colors by Fenellosa, shows what remarkable decorative quality can result from absolute naturalistic treatment. The design consists of nothing but a continuous grouping of blue irises waving their tall stems among their pointed leaves.

Korin, like Sotatsu, loved to contrast various flower and leaf forms. One of his screens representing "Flowers of the Seasons," is a continuous frieze of peach blossoms, primroses, columbine, irises and other early flowers—against a neutral background, but growing naturally—the decorative quality being due to Korin's contrast of large forms against small, and dark color against light.

Korin's sketches of flowers were frequently copied in woodcuts in the next century. They are broadly treated with very little color and were admirable in serving to stamp upon the art of wood engraving that simplicity for which it became noted.

Up to the sixteenth century Japanese art of whatever school had, like the Chinese, been aristocratic. Painting had been considered the privilege of noble birth—"a gentle art"—and pictures or decorations were made chiefly for the palaces of royal and wealthy patrons, or for the temples. But at this time there arose a more popular and genre school, founded by Matahei, living 1578-1650. It was this school which found its chief expression eventually in wood-engraving, and therefore

was based upon the old Chinese line tradition rather than upon the Japanese color design. Tanyu was a painter who was studying life about him. He made thousands of studies of fish, birds, reptiles, insects and flowers. But Monorobu, 1647-1695, did most to establish the school. He painted scenes from the life of the people, their pleasures, dancing girls, flirtation scenes, the stage, etc., mostly in Yedo (Tokio), hence the name *Ukijo-je*, "painting of the floating world." Because these pictures were made for the populace and must necessarily command but a small price, the incentive arose to reproduce them in prints.

Harunobu (1718-1770) was the founder of Japanese wood printing in the style familiar to us in the West. With him continued the essentially naturalistic movement in Japanese art (Fig. 71). Shigenaga, his master about 1740, started two-color printing—previously prints had been hand-colored upon a plain background—but Harunobu used many colors, first giving his backgrounds soft grey or green coloring, and then, by increasing the numbers of his blocks, multiplied his colors until finally fifteen were applied by as many blocks. The year 1763 marks the date of his first real polychrome print.

It was Harunobu who popularized the *surimono*—the New Year or Announcement card—a square, small-sized picture which was later used principally for still-life.

In the Peytel Collection, Paris, there is a veritable still-life print by Harunobu which illustrates perfectly the influence of the ancient Chinese tradition, through Sesshu and Josetsu. It is a vase of flowers. The back-



HARUNOBU  
VASE OF FLOWERS AND RISING MOON  
COLLECTION OF J. PEYTEL, PARIS





ground is softly tinted grey, with clouds, above which rises a full moon, pale and silvery. The vase of flowers, a large, crater-shaped urn, with three small grotesque-headed feet, takes up the lower half of the composition. As if growing in sand, a group of small flowers, with their stems and leaves, peer out over the edge—all delicately designed in pale colors. The whole is an arrangement in greys, ochres and pale pinks, but the clearness of the colors gives it a luminosity for which Harunobu was famous.

But perhaps it was Hokusai (1760-1849) who did most to promote still-life painting. He it was who used the surimono form so extensively that it became popular with his many pupils and followers. As a painter who endeavored to picture the entire cycle of human interests, he gave his attention to genre subjects of trivial character, historical and legendary tales, landscape, animal life, flowers and pure still-life of inanimate objects. Between 1830 and his death, he produced a set of ten large flower pictures, a set of ten smaller ones, and a large study of chickens. His large "Lobster and Pine Branch" in the Vever Collection, Paris,<sup>4</sup> which may be considered a true still-life picture, is a fine example of decoration. The title itself indicates the interesting color contrasts in green. The lobster, boldly designed, twisting about on his tail, his great antennae stretching clear across the panel, forms a striking contrast to the delicate needles of the pine branch.

In his decorative flower panels Hokusai adhered to

<sup>4</sup> Reproduced in von Seidlitz, p. 172.

## POTS AND PANS

the principles of the great older masters of design, sweeping his forms across the panels.

Unlike Korin and Sotatsu, he preferred large flowers, and seems to have been inspired rather by Chien Chun Chii (Shunkio) and Joki, taking parts of a large plant or vine, as though his picture represented a segment. But he had none of the subtlety and delicacy of these masters. His compositions are seldom filled, never crowded, as he depended upon large bare spaces to increase the decorative effect. Some of his compositions of flowers in the British Museum are especially rich, where he has placed great open red and pink flowers, dangling on their tall stems amidst their luxurious leaves, against a plain background of rich blue. There is little shading to his leaves and petals, as it is not depth of tone nor volume that is demanded of a print, but simple washes of color and bold contrasts. Hokusai was one of those Japanese artists who loved to play with their art. Von Seidlitz very justly remarks that the fundamental idea in any rhythmic art, like the Japanese, is that of play. Hokusai never tired of experiments, of caprices; the trivial or the serious was always treated with the same spontaneous freedom, and his still-life pieces were the result of the playful impulse that so often animated him.

Two of Hokusai's pupils paid special attention to still-lives in surimono form. I have before me a number of little greeting cards by Gakutei, Hokkei, Shinsai, and others.

Many of these are very charming trivialities. Hokkei is the most talented of the group. One of his surimonos represents a black lacquered chest with gold and silver



HOKKEI, SURIMONO OR GREETING CARD



## CHINESE AND JAPANESE STILL-LIFE PAINTING

ornaments, and open drawers out of which streams a quantity of clothing (Fig. 72). It is a composition in subtle brown, reds, blacks, gold and silver. Another Hokkei likewise shows a black chest, over which is thrown an actor's wardrobe of strange garments. Shinsai was a very prolific artist in surimono. One of these before me represents a screen, lacquered brown and black, a bow and quiver of arrows—old Japanese weapons—and a vase of twigs. Another Shinsai represents a zylophone table, a black lacquered box, with actor's equipment. Still another shows us a lacquered table with a piece of bric-a-brac upon it, while on the floor is a box of clothing.

As with all still-life painting, whether western or oriental, the apparent triviality of the objects portrayed has little to do with the aesthetic character of the picture. In the case of the surimones, as with the flower arrangements of Harunobu, the decorative treatment, the design, is the principal thing. As we have seen, with the exception of Koyetsu, Korin and the colorist school of Japan, all Chinese and Japanese still-life was concerned most with line. When the western world late in the nineteenth century was confronted for the first time with this historic art, they witnessed the negation of all that the old masters of Europe had made traditional.



**CHAPTER 7**  
**MODERN DUTCH STILL-LIFE PAINTING**



## CHAPTER 7

"Art *was* our national glory," writes the Dutch critic Max Havelaer, "it is *now* our national sin."

It is difficult for a people with a great past to appreciate their own present, and the Dutch look back upon a Golden Age whose splendour has forever vanished. That Golden Age was, of course, the seventeenth century. But Hollanders look back almost as proudly, and perhaps more fondly, because the memory is more fresh, upon the Renaissance of the nineteenth century.

In Israëls they delight to see a reflection of Rembrandt, imperfect to be sure, but still resembling him. Not since the seventeenth century has any man, save Millet, painted age and human suffering with the sympathy of Israëls. In the great Bosboom they find the old painters of church interiors reborn, Pieter Neefs, Jacob van Vliet and Emmanuel de Witte; only Bosboom seems to fill the ancient churches with far more of their true religious spirit than any of his predecessors have done. In Christoffel Bisschop, painter of Frisian life, in Kever, Artz, Neuhuys and Blommers, all painters of peasant types and of cottage interiors, the Little Mas-

ters—littler still perhaps—appear again in modern guise. In still-life painting, too, the old Dutch masters were revived in Maria Vos, Adriana Haanen, van de Sande Bakhuyzen and Allebé. But best of all are the landscape painters of the nineteenth century, for the Maris brothers, Jongkind, Mauve, Poggenbeek, Weissenbruch, Théophile de Bock, Gabriël and Roelofs surpass anything that was done in landscape in the Golden Era. One single painter of the seventeenth century alone hold his own in modern landscape. When one stands before Vermeer's "View of Delft" in the Mauritshuis, The Hague, one realizes that Vermeer is not an Old Master, but a modern one.

The Hague group of painters formed a truly great school. They represented a Period in Dutch art. Founded on national traditions—although influenced by the Barbizon—they took their inspiration from Dutch life and Dutch scenery. They were thoroughly Dutch themselves. The Hague painters found or could find their fellow countrymen in the same environment, pretty much, that surrounded them when the seventeenth century masters flourished. The same skies hovered overhead, the same thatched or tile-roofed cottages and windmills dotted the landscape. The same rugged folk married, bore large families of children, lived their lives of hardship mixed with pleasure, as in the age two hundred years before.

Today, as we look on the works of these painters—most especially those of Jacob Maris, Mauve and Bosboom—we find an old-master quality in them. And yet they are, or were in their day, modern. They are more

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personal, more impressionistic, more colorful; that is why they are modern. And they have that quality called style, by which we can always tell a Bosboom or a Maris or a Mauve; that is why they are masterpieces.

Naturally, now that these men are all dead, we have taken it for granted that art in Holland has died with them. The Dutch themselves, many of them, have taken the same attitude, for that is the way with every generation—to think that art is dead.

But where is the *artist* who will believe it? Fortunately there is another side of the story.

That still-life painting is highly appreciated today in Holland is revealed by the Dutch art critic Albert Plasschaert who writes very feelingly on the subject.<sup>1</sup> He says that the art of Holland is essentially that of still-life—an art of quiet and sober things. One of his passages about still-life is worth quoting:

“You must know how quiet things can stand in their kingdom of a room, if you wish to enjoy still-life. . . . Still-life is the vase of roses in a room on which shines the late golden light of evening. Still-life is the light—the restful light seen through an open doorway, in a far-off room, like an illusion. Still-life is the speech of lifeless things, the admission that things can speak. Still-life is the glass of water—the fleeting glimmer of the water, like burnished metal. Still-life is the bouquet of field-flowers, or the death’s head with a wine-red cloth, or the ceramic tile on which Love flees, or the wax-like shine of anemones, many anemones. Still-life is all these, and, too, it is the gentle confession of the heart.”

<sup>1</sup> “Het Zien van Schilderijen,” Arnhem, 1919.

## POTS AND PANS

And again he writes, "Seek in a still-life stillness and meditation. You may find there action, drama and passion, but the best still-life is that wherein inward calm is attained in quietness."

Such passages show an unusual mystical interpretation of still-life painting. But what he says is true, for in the pictures of the greatest masters of still-life, like those of Kalff, Chardin and Latour, or of Volland, Dearth and Carlsen, there is a serenity and calm which induces mystical contemplation. One can be extremely hopeful for modern Dutch art when still-life painting is so well appreciated and understood.

It would be rash to say that a great period—a new epoch—is beginning in Holland, but it is clear to anyone visiting the exhibitions of contemporary art, where the works of various living painters are hung together, that a decided and interesting development is taking place. In spite of the great differences between the painters, perhaps more violent than between any painters of the same land in previous times, there is a note in common. There is something in the exhibitions, as entities, which proclaims them to be of the twentieth century and Dutch. For the best—which are not eccentric—we detect that the Dutch attitude toward life is after all pictured here; and because we see Dutch types and Dutch homes and Dutch furnishings, we find something in common with the Dutch art of the past. And yet the great difference—at first overwhelming, and obliterating all similarities to anything past—is the *new vision*, a vision above all of color, intense, vibrating color, at the expense of sub-

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tleties of tone. Tonalism?—it is a thing of the past—or so it appears at first. And then one becomes aware of new purposes—the decorative and the symbolic. This new art is not so much of the heart as of the eye. One's heart is not touched, as with poetic sadness at the pictures of Israëls or Artz, but one's eyes are delighted. This is not a poetic, a literary, a philosophic nor a moralistic art, but a sensuous art, at times mystical, emotional, but in a different way from anything before. There is color, design and pattern. The appeal is to the outward eye. And yet the inward eye also responds, for “Beauty is its own excuse for being” and has its own mysterious need in our spiritual life.

It must not be forgotten that of the great schools of the seventeenth century, the still-life tradition in Holland alone remained unbroken through the centuries. Still-life painting was not affected by the French regime. It lingered longest, and was kept alive by Art Schouman (1710-1792), Jan van Os (1744-1808), Maria van Os (1780-1862), and Adriana Haanen (1814-1895).

In the realm of still-life painting today the Dutch are true to their national tradition. Faithful, we should say, as far as subject matter is concerned, to an interest in objects because of what they can express. And the Dutch are also true to their creative sense, in making new discoveries, in finding new possibilities in the visible world. In still-life painting some of the most original work that is being done in any part of the world is being done in Holland.

I shall commence by going back to the older painters. Of Maria Vos (1824-1906), I have already written in

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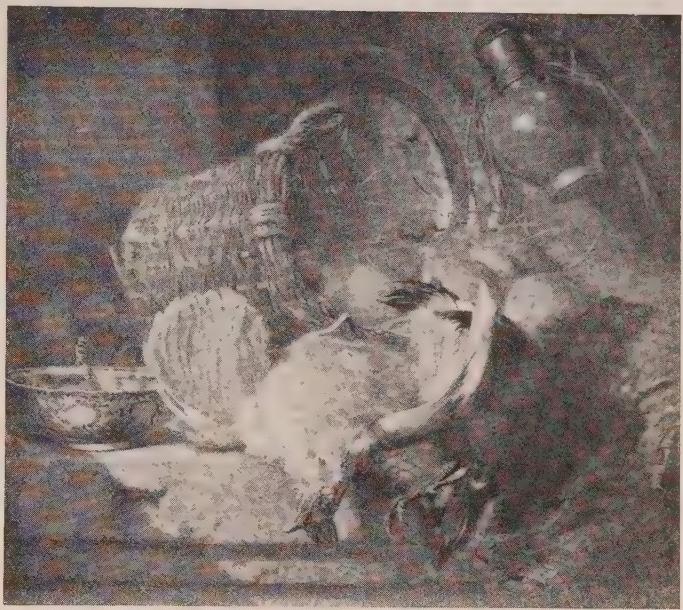
the chapter on the seventeenth century schools. Although of the nineteenth century, she was a re-incarnation of the old masters, and second to none. She could do everything, almost, that the old still-life masters could do, rich decorative objects in the style of Kalff, dead game and poultry in the style of Fyt or Weenix, or fruit and flowers in the style of Van Aelst (Fig. 73).

Another good still-life painter of the nineteenth century is Allebé, a veteran painter, still living. His pictures are small but very refined. Generally a basket of strawberries, or a bunch of asparagus is all he attempts. With him we have not reached the new decorative formula—we are still in the intimate period.

Van de Sande Bakhuyzen attempted the style of van Huysum, in his still-life pictures—the large collection of fruit on a stone table supposedly out of doors. His work is not so meticulous as van Huysum's, although he is a bit botanical. He could hardly be called modern.

The still-life painters of the older generation are almost too numerous to mention. Mevrouw Bisschop Robertson painted breakfast pieces in the style of the old Haarlem school, yet more modern in technical treatment. Her coloring shows the influence of Courbet; her pictures are therefore realistic but not colorful.

Van Beyeren has his disciples in Holland as well as in France. William Roelofs, Jr., the son of the well-known landscapist, has painted fish, slices of haddock with brown jugs and breakfast dishes. Yongkint is another disciple of van Beyeren. His fishes with cauliflower or other vegetables are quite in the spirit of the old masters, with a trifle more brightness of coloring.



MARIA VOS, STILL-LIFE  
BOYMAN'S MUSEUM, ROTTERDAM



## MODERN DUTCH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

But with all these painters I have not yet touched upon any who show that modern freshness of vision, or fertility of invention which I have said were characteristic of still-life painting in Holland today. With all our admiration for national traditions in art, we are eager to find in each age an expression that is new.

Willem Witsen is undoubtedly one of the most distinguished of Dutch painters. Distinguished? Yes, in that his work shows a power, a grasp, an understanding which is exhibited only by a great individuality. It does not reflect the art of any other man. His more youthful work does. Some of his early street scenes and buildings show that he began where Koekhoek, Springer and Klinkenberg left off, being very careful studies of sunlight and shadow with rather too much minute architectural detail. Then, as his work develops, one is reminded of Bastert, and still more of Vermeer. But later he loses that imitative objectivity, and his buildings become more subjective—expressive.

One of the very finest still-lives in any Dutch gallery is Witsen's study of chrysanthemums in the Stedelyk Museum of Amsterdam. It is a large canvas, with nothing more than a copper cauldron filled with an enormous bunch of small yellow flowers. These are impressionistically rendered—broadly handled for distant effect, and yet each flower is distinct and full of character. They are as bright a yellow as can be imagined, with a full light sparkling upon them. For richness of color, boldness of design and simplicity of arrangement the canvas is unsurpassed.

Another flower painter is Floris Verster of Leiden. A prolific painter, simple in his arrangements, and treating flowers for their own sake, he might almost be called the Fantin-Latour of Holland today. Yet he is unlike this French painter in that he often sacrifices form for color. When he paints peonies, it is their gorgeousness alone he cares about; when he paints nasturtiums, it is their brilliancy and not their form. Herein is his modernity. Sometimes he seeks purple color schemes and when he does this, it is clear he has been influenced by the school of Monet. He is above all a luminist.

In originality of design, ingenuity of subject matter and decorative qualities, Lizzy Ansingh deserves first place among all modern Dutch still-life painters. Wherever her work appears, it has the greatest distinction. Her subject matter is dolls—Japanese dolls—French dolls—old-fashioned Dutch dolls—any kind she finds. But one scarcely realizes they are dolls. Take, for example, her “Awakening” in the Stedelyk Museum, Amsterdam. (Her titles, too, deserve attention, suggesting, like the pictures themselves, something beyond the objective fact.) It is like a picture by Arthur Rackham or Edmund Dulac, only far more interpretative of an original conception. It seems to be suggestive of a fairy tale, yet not illustrative. One should say it is not imitative of an oriental style, but Asiatic in spirit, at any rate, exotic. Then one looks intently and sees in the amazing design Japanese dolls, peacock feathers and gorgeously plumaged birds. The color scheme is blue and green. It might be the bottom of the sea, so like another world it appears.



LIZZY ANSINGH, DE VERSTOOTENE  
(THE CAST-OFF TOYS)



## MODERN DUTCH STILL-LIFE PAINTING

Sometimes her work reminds one of the later pictures by Henry Golden Dearth. One of her studies, entitled "De Verstootene" ("The Cast-Off Toys") (Fig. 74), with Japanese dolls, is treated in the style of ancient Japanese battle scenes. The little figures, clad in red and black, seem to be swinging their arms like warriors.

Two other women painters of still-life are highly appreciated in Holland today—Suze Robertson and Coba Ritsema. Suze Robertson is not so distinctly original in her subject matter as Lizzy Ansingh. She is content with the bottles and jars, the plates, vegetables and fruits familiar to us in the older masters. She is distinctly modern, however, in her broad handling. There is great strength in her design, and what distinguishes her most perhaps in the seriousness of her work. Her coloring adds to this, for while it is bold and often vigorous, it is sombre, like tragic music.

Coba Ritsema, like Suze Robertson, is a forceful painter who handles her pigment broadly, aiming for plastic effect. Sometimes her arrangements are quite striking,—on account of their simplicity. She has a very personal way of interpreting objects, but perhaps she is most talented as a colorist.

A painter who shows the same fertility of invention as Lizzy Ansingh is Dysselhoff. He paints scenes in the great aquaria of Amsterdam. As if viewed from within the depths of the sea, his fishes seem to swim in actual water. On the bottom are bizarre aquatic plants,

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sea anemones with their wide-open mouths, monsters with streaming tentacles and every kind of weird finned being, both beautiful and ugly. Sometimes he confines his sea animals to lobsters—live green lobsters, an unfamiliar sort to art.

Van Hoytema is perhaps the strongest painter of pure decorative design. One sees at once in his work that he has been inspired by the famous seventeenth century decorators Hondekoeter and Weenix, while he is at the same time mostly influenced by the Chinese and Japanese. These two influences are not conflicting. His landscapes have all the suggestive qualities of the Japanese, being carefully designed; his compositions of birds are splendid in arrangement and delicate in detail.

The ingenuity of some of these modern Dutch decorative painters strikes one particularly in viewing the work of Goedvriendt. Goedvriendt paints mushrooms and toad-stools, great specimens with magnificent red, yellow or green heads—dangerous, poisonous-looking deformations, but yet how weirdly beautiful! Goedvriendt's mushrooms are growing out of doors, that is, they appear to be springing out of the leafy mold of the woods, but the darkness of the tree trunks behind them is more like that of a tapestry curtain. These mushrooms are, we believe, not studies of life, but compositions of a very original character.

Most of these painters just mentioned may be called decorative, exotic, still-life painters. With the others

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they form a group whose work will certainly last. More names could be added, for still-life painting is popular with modern artists. There is de Zwart who loves the rich reds of geraniums, and Hobbe Smit who prefers the decorative effects of Chinese vases with flowers. Van Wyngaerdt with his lobsters, copper kettles and jugs shows the influence of Manet, while Jan Sluyters with his decorative patches and distorted drawing shows the influence of Cézanne. Independent of any influence, apparently, is de Winter, called an Expressionist, who seeks the mystical symbolism of flowers. The list could go on, but it is far from the purpose of this chapter to be encyclopaedic. It is enough to indicate the work that is being done today in the land where still-life painting was born.



**CHAPTER 8**

**AMERICAN STILL-LIFE PAINTING**



## CHAPTER 8

### I. FLOWERS

LAFARGE, 1835-1910

John Lafarge returned to New York from his travels in Europe in the winter of 1857-58. He had not yet started on his career as a painter—he still intended to take up law. But, as we know, he was destined to be an artist, and not a year had elapsed after his return before he had thrown himself heart and soul into his life work. Curiously enough, his first pictures were landscapes and still-lives. From 1859 throughout the sixties he produced the series of flower studies which gave him a position alongside of Fantin-Latour as one of the great interpreters of flowers in the nineteenth century.

It was curious that his first pictures should have been still-lives or flower studies, because the painting of flowers was not considered at that time, in America at least, to be a very high aim in art. What training Lafarge had received, what influences had been exerted upon him, were either academic or romantic. Although no young man could have enjoyed a more liberalizing,

#### POTS AND PANS

cosmopolitan training than he, there was little inspiration in the art schools of Europe for a still-life painter. Certainly neither the atelier of Couture, nor the association of the Pre-Raphaelites would have turned Lafarge's thoughts to flower painting. Fantin-Latour, Vollon, Bonvin and the rest were all of his own age and had not yet done their remarkable still-life work. Even Courbet had not arrived at his still-life period.

In America there was no precedent whatever for flower painting. It is difficult for us to put ourselves back, in thought, to those provincial times, when, in America, not even the Barbizon painters were known. American art was still a part of the English school. Artists outside the domain of portraiture occupied themselves with the historical episode or romance, or with the familiar sentimental genre. In landscape the romantic or grandiose was considered to be the only kind sublime enough for art. "The Hudson River School" was struggling to express the individual beauties of American scenery. Much good work was done, but it must be admitted that the middle of the nineteenth century was a period when art had sunk to a very low ebb. The great portrait painters of England and the few in America were dead. The Pre-Raphaelite movement was just awakening England, but nothing was as yet awakening America. Because of the decay of the English school and of the Puritanic prejudice against the French, American artists had turned to Düsseldorf—the centre of romance—and to Munich for inspiration. They could scarcely have turned to a worse source.

For Lafarge with his Parisian connections, to have

started out as a painter, of whatever kind, in America, was therefore a courageous experiment on his part. But he met with William Morris Hunt, a Paris-trained man. With his encouragement and assistance it was possible for Lafarge to continue.

We have not yet accounted for his interest in flower painting. This was due to his knowledge of and appreciation for Japanese art. That Lafarge so early in life, and so early in the nineteenth century, should have understood the significance of the Japanese is no slight indication of his keen aesthetic insight. Japanese prints had only just been introduced into the West. There were few artists who saw anything in them beyond their decorative character, and this was considered to be so trifling as to be fit only for fans and seashore cottages. Lafarge, from the very first, and independently, saw the importance of this oriental art. Whistler, Manet, Monet, and a few others in France, it is true, were experimenting with Japanese design and tonality, but it must be remembered we are speaking of 1860.

Lafarge's flower-studies are by no means adaptations of Japanese designs. They are not even Japanesque in character. On the contrary, they are thoroughly western, naturalistic and painted from direct observation. Lafarge was sensible enough to know that as the inheritor of western traditions in painting, and accustomed as he was from infancy to certain media and tools, certain ways of looking at things, he would find it impossible to throw over every accepted formula and instead to take over oriental formulas and an oriental point of view. But it was clear to him, as it has become clear to us,

that the Chinese and the Japanese knew infinitely more about flower painting than Europeans did, especially more about the decorative expressiveness of flowers.

The difference may best be understood by comparing flower painting in Europe up to Lafarge's time with the Japanese. In the West, de Heem, Mignon and van Huysum had been the accepted masters of this art. They had established an infinitely delicate style, minutely accurate and highly ornate. While their own products are to be highly valued for their sumptuousness and richness, their influence was bad, as it led to a photographic literalness or realism, which in the hands of their followers became mere imitation. The Japanese, on the other hand, as we have seen, were more impressionistic, that is, they represented the character, the spirit of flowers, but more than that they sought to express the decorative value of them. This is what Lafarge did (Fig. 75).

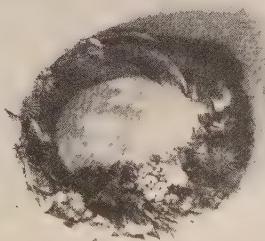
Lafarge sought the spirit of flowers rather than their botanical form. Recalling his early flower studies, he himself said, "There were certain in which I tried to give something more than a study or a handsome arrangement. Some few were paintings of the water-lily, which has always appealed to the sense of something of a meaning—a mysterious appeal such as comes to us from certain arrangements of notes of music."<sup>1</sup> His "Wild Rose and Water Lily" in the possession of Mr. M. B. Philipp of New York illustrates as clearly as any of his pictures this subjective feeling. It represents the margin of a pool where a clump of wild roses is reflected

<sup>1</sup> Cortissoz, p. 136.

MARIA OAKEY DEWING  
POPPIES AND MIGNONETTE  
FREER COLLECTION



JOHN LAFARGE, WREATH





in the iridescent water. One large, magnificent water-lily, growing close by a great lily-leaf, occupies the foreground of the picture. It is a bit of nature, in no sense a formal arrangement. Only a part of the rose clump is seen, just four or five flowers are allowed to counterbalance the one large lily. It is not a Japanese arrangement—the liquid water, the reflections, the dampness and wetness are all too natural, but one can hardly conceive of the picture having been painted save for Lafarge's intimacy with Japanese art.

That Lafarge was interested in flowers in a way entirely new to the western world is indicated by the large scale of his compositions. He wished to paint his flowers in their environment, growing out of doors, or decoratively arranged in the house. Hence his canvases are necessarily large, and produce on the part of the beholder in a surprising way the lavish effect of nature.

Lafarge's flower studies occupied only a short period of his career. They were experiments with him, but he painted enough to show the never-ending possibilities of flower compositions. Each kind of flower presented to him a new problem—for each demanded individual treatment. Violets—how should they be painted? In a shallow bowl? And where? On a window sill, with the window open where the breeze can waft their fragrance to the chance beholder? Roses—how should they be placed? On a table, against a curtain, where the light can play upon them and contrast their delicate splendor against the sombreness of their surroundings?

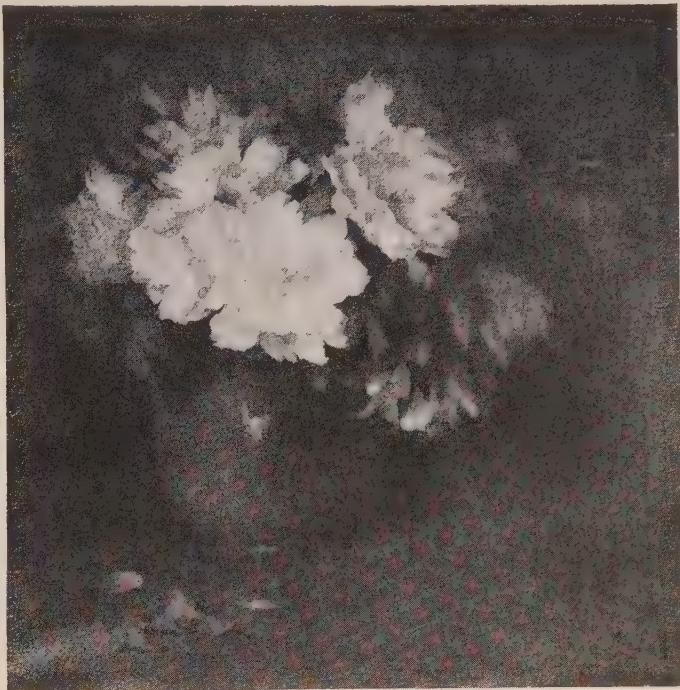
Such questions Lafarge was continually trying to solve, and these are questions which every flower painter

must ask himself. If the expressiveness of flowers be understood, their interpretation becomes one of the most fascinating studies for the painter. To catch the evanescence of poppies, the delicacy of roses or the subtlety of morning glories, the pure decorative quality of fox-gloves, camellias or peonies is a pursuit worthy of every effort.

Lafarge, Fantin-Latour and the Japanese have revolutionized the art of flower painting in the West. Note-worthy in America are the names of Maria Oakey Dewing, Wilton Lockwood, two pupils of Lafarge, Julia Dillon and Howard Gardner Cushing.

Wilton Lockwood, 1861-1914, was principally a portraitist. A work which well illustrates his style is his portrait of John Lafarge. Thoughtfully studied, analytical, it shows the American master deep in contemplation, and removed from too harsh a view by a soft film of atmosphere. This "envelope," as it has been called, Lockwood uses in his flower studies. Only one of these latter need be cited—the very fine example in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 77). It is a vase of peonies. The handsome flowers are delicately, subtly suggested as though dimly seen. It is a naturalistic study, carefully drawn, absolutely truthful, but so gently handled that one feels that the painter understood his flowers and their vanishing beauty.

The art of Howard Gardiner Cushing (1869-1916), is the most exotic of that of any American painter, save perhaps that of Henry Golden Dearth. He has en-



WILTON LOCKWOOD, PEONIES  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK



deavored perhaps more than any one else to catch the spirit of the Orient. His pictures oftentimes recall the Japanese, at other times the Chinese, but one can see the Persian and the Indian in them as well. The fact is that they breathe the Orient; his figures are unreal, they are dreams or visions of light and gorgeous, brilliant coloring. His women, small-eyed, red-haired, in dazzling robes, move in a world as strange as that of the Arabian Nights. There are no analogies we can make in regard to him. The names of such painters as Whistler and Henri, two extremes, who were influenced by the art of Asia, rush to our lips only to be forced back again, or we think of the illustrators of mysterious fairy tales like Howard Pyle or Edmund Dulac. But strange to say we are reminded, too, of that far-distant painter, Simone Martini, and we do not repel the thought, for this Siennese primitive was exotic too.

To describe his pictures is to explain them best. The one in the Metropolitan is entitled "Interior" and is one, presumably, of an American home—but one of those furnished in a pseudo-Japanese style. The walls are pale, with delicate opal tones, which reflect the glow that radiates from distant unseen openings. A faint design of pine branches decorates them. Against the wall and in the foreground is a large, carved teakwood table, with highly polished top, on which are three vases: one large, with a red and blue design, stands between two smaller ones of ivory tone. Through a doorway half hidden behind the table, radiant in light, there is a little child, with blue dress and resplendent hair. The figure

is undoubtedly a portrait, but in spite of the fact the picture is that of an interior—and of still-life.

One of the finest of Cushing's still-lives is that which the writer remembers in the Pennsylvania Academy's one hundred and tenth annual exhibition of 1915 (Fig. 78). It is a decorative arrangement of flowers, in the true Japanese style. The background is a wallpaper of pale tones with Chinese landscapes very faintly patterned. Against this is placed a plain dark lacquered table with slender legs and on this is a tall vase of simple dahlias, and a flat bowl of spirea. There could be no better juxtaposition of shapes. The coloring is even more decorative. Imagine the grey tones of the wallpaper, against this the light ivory tones of the vases, the deep mahogany of the table, the white and yellow of the dahlias with their green leaves, and the deep pinks and brown of the spirea. Totally unlike anything by Fantin-Latour or Lafarge, it is nothing more than a decoration, but splendid as such, and of exquisite taste.

It is one of the most regrettable circumstances in American art history that this gifted artist died at the age of forty-seven, for had he lived, he would undoubtedly have created a body of work as distinctive as it was akin in many respects to that of Henry Golden Dearth.

Maria Oakey Dewing is a flower painter whose reputation was gained in the days of Vollon and Fantin-Latour. Her flowers have frequently been compared to those of the two great French masters—compliment enough. They should also be compared to those of Sotatsu, for the best and most characteristic flower pieces



HOWARD GARDINER CUSHING  
SPIREA AND SINGLE DAHLIAS  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK



of Mrs. Dewing show the same appreciation of and respect for flowers as do the works of the great Japanese screen painter.

Mrs. Dewing's art, however, is the result purely and simply of her own observation of flowers. She is a botanist. She loves her flower garden and she loves to watch her flowers grow. "When I paint flowers," she says, "I paint more than I see. I paint what I know is there. For example, I know how the poppy bursts its calyx, so that when I paint poppies they are true to nature."

The impressionist—or any moderner for that matter—regards this attitude toward art with disdain. To the laboratory with botany! There is a danger from scientific accuracy in art, but a Japanese would understand the point of view of Maria Oakey Dewing. One of her best canvases was owned by no less a connoisseur than Mr. Charles L. Freer of Detroit (Fig. 76). It is an out-of-doors study of poppies and mignonette, growing in a garden. The canvas is completely filled with the gorgeous plants—the red and white poppies bending their heads, and the tall white spurs of mignonette shooting up among the maze of green leaves.

Other pictures in this style are: "The Lilac Bush" owned by Mr. John Gellatly of New York, a large canvas, six by four feet, with an entire lilac bush, a flowering almond and a bed of narcissus; "Rose Garden" formerly owned by Ambassador Whitelaw Reid; "Calla Lilies" in Smith College, "Lilies and Larkspur" also in Smith College, and "Carnations" formerly owned by William M. Chase.

These remarkable works are absolutely unique. There is nothing else like them in the field of flower painting. Chase, a flower painter himself, called such pictures as her "Poppies and Mignonette" "impeccable." The closest approach to them are the screens of Koyetsu or Sotatsu. Yet the idea of painting flowers out of doors the artist derived from her master, John Lafarge. There is in reality no foreign influence to be detected in them, not that of the *plein-airists*, and certainly not that of the impressionists.

Much of her work is of varying quality, and many of her studies of flowers in vases are not to be compared with her earlier out-of-door work. It is but seldom that she appears as a colorist or as a luminist. Often her botanical accuracy at the expense of brightness and lightness and freshness is painful. But, judged by her best work, Maria Oakey Dewing remains one of the most distinguished flower painters in America.

No discussion of flower painting in America, however brief, is complete without mention of J. Alden Weir, the late president of the New York Academy of Design. His recent death has served to evoke a fuller appreciation of his work, and the memorial exhibitions which are now being arranged will happily bring before a wider public a knowledge of the scope of his talent.

For suavity of brushwork and keen sensitiveness of the delicacy of flowers, his early flower studies are unsurpassed (Fig. 79). He was not a modernist in the sense of breaking with traditions, and seeking bold decorative effects of design and color at the expense of refine-



J. ALDEN WEIR, ROSES  
COLLECTION OF MR. C. L. BALDWIN



## AMERICAN STILL-LIFE PAINTING

ment of form. Like Fantin-Latour he accepted the principles of painting which he deemed imperishable, without being bound to them, and thus, unhampered by new theories, he was able to give his imagination free play. In other words, he felt that technical accomplishment should be subordinated to spiritual qualities. His still-life studies, as well as his figures and landscapes are revelations of the man's fine personality—poetic, sensitive, responsive to inward beauty.

As was natural with a painter of this type, his subjects were not new. He delighted to paint dead hares with copper kettles and green bottles, or tall silver goblets with baskets of fruit and of flowers, but with a modern regard for the realities of form and of texture without meticulous attention to detail. So that we can truthfully say that the still-lives of J. Alden Weir are of the fine old tradition freshened by his own personal vision.

### II. FISH

CHASE, 1849-1916

William Merritt Chase was, during his lifetime, the most conspicuous still-life painter in America. He obtained his early training in Munich under Piloty and Wilhelm Kaulbach the Younger, but it is doubtful whether he was permanently influenced by either painter. He was more inspired by the old masters. At that time Hans Makart was one of the Munich celebrities. His studio was a museum of antiquities. Here he collected rich oriental carpets, heavy silken stuffs,

## POTS AND PANS

Japanese vases, weapons and inlaid furniture. Richly ornamented German chests of the Renaissance stood near Chinese idols and Greek terra-cottas, Smyrna rugs, Gobelins and old Italian and Netherland pictures hung on the walls. These objects with which he surrounded himself contributed to give elegance, richness of coloring, and variety to his art. Makart was not by any means unique as an artist in loving such things, but the fame of his studio must have inspired the envy of Chase. We are reminded of this association, for Chase likewise drew into his studio many a rare bit of old brass and copper, tapestry, French and Flemish furniture and pictures. He loved things for their face value, their rich surfaces, and the interesting contrasts of form and color which they made. Moreover such a wealth of objects could give him abundant material for still-lives.

Chase was not a painter of the inwardness of things. In his portraits he achieved a startling distinction. He caught the resemblance and gave to his sitters a dignity which was always noteworthy. But there is little analysis, psychology or mystery about them. For what interested him was the texture of garments or the delicate surface of skin. "If you can paint a pot, you can paint an angel," was an expression attributed to him. This being the case, he was best at still-life painting where the surface values of things count for most.

In this realm he was unchallenged. From his earliest period his still-lives were a success. When he returned to St. Louis, after his European training, he began painting portraits and still-lives, but it was the latter which made him most famous. During his whole life



WILLIAM M. CHASE, FISH  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK



he turned to still-life painting as his recreation—it was what he most loved to do.

Chase, like Vollon, showed little interest in modern art theories. Manet's passion for structure, the Impressionists' preoccupation for the transitory effects of light, Cézanne's revolt against the conventions of form, did not affect him. He returned rather to the old masters of Holland; it may be said that he revived in America the art of the Dutch still-life masters and of Chardin. He recalls most Abraham van Beyeren, the great painter of fish.

When one comes think of it, fish are the most paintable objects in nature. Their fluid quality, their sliminess, their lustre, their brilliancy of color lend themselves most readily to the art of a painter in oils. Not that they are easy to paint—on the contrary, it requires the utmost dexterity of brushwork to obtain their fresh and shimmering sheen. And it cannot be done by prolonged, laborious work. A dead fish loses its fishiness on long acquaintance, while at the same time it gains other qualities we need not mention.

One of the best examples of Chase's studies of fish is fortunately in the Metropolitan Museum (Fig. 80). The canvas displays three fish lying on a platter on which is also a red apple. Close by are two bright green peppers on a dark green cloth-covered table, while in the background are a tall copper vessel and a dark red bowl. The objects are all placed in deep shadow, save the fish, on one of which especially the light is concentrated. This effect contributes to the richness of the coloring and enhances the shimmer of the fish. Chase was accustomed to use

siccatif and varnish as a medium, which gives great lustre but which requires quick execution. It is possible that this mixture was used in this picture. According to his pupil, Miss Roof, his fish pictures were completed in a single day. The device of placing green peppers and a red apple near the fish—he was especially fond of a note of red—shows that the painter knew the value of contrasting colors, as well as the added interest aroused by a variety of shapes.

One of his more elaborate compositions of fish is in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Painted boldly with free, fluid strokes, it displays three groups of fish on a table. In the background is a plate with three large fish and a large earthen bowl; in front is a small bowl and a plate of smaller fish, while on the table lies a large cod with a few smaller fish like smelts nearby. The painting is not noteworthy as design, but for splendor of color it is all that can be desired.

A better example is his “English Cod” in the Corcoran Gallery, Washington. The principal object is a great codfish lying on a Chinese plate. A few smaller fish are grouped near it. In the background is a large brightly-lighted bucket. This is the kind of picture which recalls van Beyeren.

Chase did not by any means confine himself to still-lives of fish. His “Autumn Still-Life” exhibited in the first Corcoran Gallery Exhibition of 1907, shows a table with a large sliced melon with other smaller fruit. In the melon we are reminded of Volland. “The Belgian Melon,” painted in Bruges in 1912, is one of his most notable still-lives. It recalls an old Dutch composition

## AMERICAN STILL-LIFE PAINTING

—a “breakfast piece” with urn, wine-glass, and platter of grapes, the great melon being most conspicuous.<sup>2</sup>

These are only a few examples of Chase’s still-lives. Fortunately nearly every important American art gallery possesses a specimen of his work, and hence they are accessible to any one interested in this branch of painting.

Chase was a great teacher and had many pupils, some of whom have become painters with established reputations. Among these Charles W. Hawthorne is of interest to us as a still-life painter.

Hawthorne is best known for his figure pieces. These are often times arrangements or designs with figures introduced as a pretext for the still-life associated with them. It will be remembered that a group of Dutch genre masters painted compositions of this kind—Teniers, Dou, and van Mieris in particular. From these as well as from Vermeer, de Hoog and Terborch, a group of American painters have derived much inspiration. These picture for us interiors delightful purely for their objective charms. Edmund C. Tarbell is one of this group. In his “Girls Reading,” “Girls Crocheting,” “A Girl Mending,” and “New England Interior,” he is as much occupied with the tables and chairs, the brie-a-brac and the details of the room as he is in the gracefully bended heads of his figures. Joseph de Camp draws our attention to the still-life in his pictures by the titles he gives them. “The Blue Cup” is an example of this. William N. Paxton insists even too strongly on

<sup>2</sup> Reproduced in “Life and Art of W. M. Chase,” by Roof, p. 240.

the silk, satin and porcelain in his pictures. His "1875" is photographic in its fidelity to objective fact. "The Housemaid" is another. There are several other painters we could mention, but Hawthorne is the most accomplished of the group for he combines most happily figures and their associated objects.

Some of his earliest pictures are still-lives. After his period of study, when he was seeking a place to settle down to work, he chose Cape Cod and Provincetown. Here he was naturally drawn to the fisherfolk, and he painted not only these rugged seafarers with their fish, but the fish themselves. Doubtless the example of Chase inspired him. His first exhibition canvases were pure still-lives, of fish and of pots and pans. With these he gained a reputation as a colorist and brilliant technician. Successful with these he later introduced figures.

Many of his simple figure compositions have a human quality which has made them as popular as some of the modern Dutch pictures of similar character. "The Boy with Shad" shows a fine, bright-looking lad with a huge shad on a salver which he can barely support. The forceful painting of the fish, with its strong color is in almost humorous contrast to the flat tones of the boy's head and blouse; we feel this is more a study of fish than of boy. We feel the same toward "The Fisherman's Daughter" which is as lovely a study of simple childhood as has been painted in America. The young girl, so fresh and so healthy, so plainly dressed, stands by a table on which is a large bottle and a few slices of lemon. She holds in her hands a large plate with two fish on it.



HENRY RITTENBERG, CHRYSANTHEMUMS



Other pictures of this kind are "The Doyen of the Fish Market," "La Gigia de l'Auberge," "Cleaning Fish," and "Refining Oil."

Henry R. Rittenberg of Philadelphia and New York is a pupil of Chase who is carrying on the forceful style of his master. Of the younger painters of America he is perhaps the most brilliant in the realm of still-life. Thoroughly modern, like Breckenridge, he turns nevertheless to the old masters for inspiration, many of whose works he has carefully copied. On his studio wall is a copy of Jordaens' "Fecundity,"<sup>3</sup> where the marvelous groups of fruit have been faithfully reproduced. It is needless to say that Van Beyeren and Vollon have had as much to do with forming his style as his own master, Chase.

Rittenberg, as did Chase, loves to collect interesting, paintable objects of every sort. About his walls and on his shelves are numerous brass and copper kettles, Russian samovars and hand-hammered bowls, Chinese porcelain jars, Japanese vases, American colonial teapots, lustre ware and many other things both rare and strange.

These are the objects which he introduces in his pictures. When he paints fish, with their indigo, green and silvery tones, the copper vessels give him the gold and yellow notes of contrast which he desires. When he paints flowers, the Chinese vases come into play. For backgrounds he has richly colored bits of tapestry, rugs or curtains (Fig. 81).

<sup>3</sup> In the Brussels Museum.

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This is the stock in trade that any of his predecessors would have used, and Rittenberg arrives at results that are often very similar to the works of the older masters. In his fish pictures he undoubtedly recalls Chase. He paints in the direct method, with a perfect dexterity and quickness of brushstroke that brings immediate results. His pictures must be finished *au premier coup*, otherwise they are never finished. This method involves risks; possibly only one out of four pictures will prove satisfactory to the painter, but Rittenberg prefers to take this risk, rather than laboriously to overwork his canvases, thus obtaining a hard and dry effect. Hence Rittenberg's successful pictures have a freshness that few still-life pictures possess. It is obvious that with fish, fruit and flowers this freshness is all-essential.

While the brilliant technique of Henry R. Rittenberg first impresses one, it is by no means the final impression which one takes away. His pictures, generally large in size, have a splendid decorative quality. I have in mind a canvas with two or three vases of flowers. Against a dark tapestry curtain, with some crumpled tissue paper, are the handsome forms of peonies, roses, carnations and calendulas, grouped in vases and scattered about on the table. These flowers are not botanically studied. "I paint flowers" said the artist to the writer, "but I never know their names. I paint fish, and I don't know a shad from a flounder." How many worlds apart are Henry R. Rittenberg and Maria Oakey Dewing! But Rittenberg paints the character of the things he sees, and anyone scientifically inclined, can give them their proper names. He aims first of all at design in

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composition and color, in other words at decoration. But instinctively the artist feels many subtleties which come out in his work, plane relationship, tone values, textures, etc.

Henry R. Rittenberg is a native of Libau, but his art is thoroughly American. It has that vitality, exuberance or freshness which we like to call American, and which we hope will be characteristic of American art for many years to come.

### III. ANCIENT AND DECORATIVE OBJECTS

#### HENRY GOLDEN DEARTH, 1864-1918

The memorial exhibition of the works of Henry Golden Dearth, which is now touring the United States, is one of the most inspiring collections of its kind that the writer has been privileged to see—inspiring because surprising, bewildering, enchanting and illuminating. One's eyes are opened to a new world—a new existence. Even to those who have become familiar with the painter's latest style, the exhibition is astonishing, for each individual picture is enhanced and explained by its neighbors, and the total impression made is quite different from that created by simple scattered works.

The pictures painted since 1912 are by far the most distinguished. These are mostly still-lives, but how unlike anything we have ever seen! Here is an art thoroughly modern—expressive of the color impulses of the present day—even symbolic, and yet how intelligible! Yes, we understand it, down to the depths of our souls—or at least we believe we understand it, just as we do the ancient myths and legends of our race.

**Henry Golden Dearth** was a man who loved the past, but unlike many antiquarian painters he did not seek the Renaissance, Italian, Dutch or French, but the early Middle Ages. Romanesque polychrome wood-carvings, Byzantine ikons, Gothic missals—these objects of a remote past, symbolic of the age of faith, meant more to him than the more familiar products of the later and more accomplished epoch. And because, no doubt, the pitiable images, Byzantine or Gothic, suggested mysteries foreign to the modern mind, he chose them as vehicles of a new message.

Byzantine art, akin as it is to Oriental, drew Dearth's attention to the East, and he found in Persian textiles, Indian embroideries, early Chinese paintings and stone carvings, Japanese screens and color prints, the same aesthetic satisfaction that he found in Gothic sculpture. For, besides being symbolic, the art of the East is essentially decorative; hence these things gave him material for the richest decorations that he could desire.

**Henry Golden Dearth** handled his materials in a perfectly modern way. He undoubtedly profited by all that was good in Cézanne—his color symbolism—his freedom from academic formulas. Dearth foresaw that the art of the immediate future must be expressive of color. Hence the still-lives of his latest phase are chiefly interpretations in color.

It is readily seen that Dearth derived little inspiration from any of his predecessors in still-life painting. There are no bonds of sympathy between him and Vollon, Chardin, or the Dutch. Nor is he in the least like Chase or Carlsen. He resembles no one—not Cushing, for the



HENRY GOLDEN DEARTH, THE LADY OF THE IRIS



## AMERICAN STILL-LIFE PAINTING

latter studied form—not any of the western painters influenced by the Japanese, for these necessarily insist upon line.

Dearth's sources are Gothic and Byzantine; his kinship is with the East, but his art is distinct and personal—entirely new in the present-day world.

One of his canvases he entitles "A XIIth Century Virgin."<sup>4</sup> It represents a polychrome madonna. The background is an embroidery with the Crucifixion designed upon it—the little statue is placed in front of this, at the foot of the cross. The table cover on which the figure is placed is red, and at one side is a vase of flowers. The severe formality of the grouping suggests hieratic religious thought—the thought of the twelfth century, but the pathos of the battered statuette arouses a personal interest in the beholder which almost makes one forget that the picture is a still-life.

Another picture is called "A Mediaeval Saint."<sup>5</sup> The background is a French tapestry of rich blues and reds. In front of this is a polychrome statue and a vase of flowers. As in all these still-lives, there is no tonality, no study of light and shade, but a flat pattern of bright color, like a mosaic or tapestry. The figures are not studies in form—the vase is obviously ill drawn without being conspicuously distorted. The result is primitive in effect.

The primitive quality in Dearth's design is plain in the picture called "A XVth Century Group."<sup>6</sup> The

<sup>4</sup> In the possession of Mrs. Robert M. Thompson.

<sup>5</sup> Collection of Mrs. Fred B. Pratt.

<sup>6</sup> Collection of Mrs. Michael Dreicer.

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wood carving in this case represents the fainting Virgin, in front of which are some vases of flowers. It is as if an exceedingly gifted child, who had never learned how to draw, but who had a remarkable sense for color and design, had painted this picture.

One of his boldest designs is the "Madonna"<sup>7</sup> where the polychrome Virgin and Child, with two vases of flowers, is placed before a black Persian embroidered background.

What, we are led to ask, gave Dearth the happy thought of associating vases of flowers with his madonnas? It seems so appropriate. Yet we dare say, any one else would have classed the broken images with old brasses, books and rosaries, though the life and symbolism and splendor would have been lost.

Perhaps the most striking and memorable design is the one called "Our Lady." The coloring is extremely bold. Against a grey-white tapestry background is placed a tall polychrome madonna, silhouetted dark and rich in blues, reds and blacks; on either side is a vase of flowers. The tablecover is of bright yellow. Even this bare description can convey a sense of the bold color-spotting—almost barbaric in its gaiety. The madonna in this case is particularly crude, primitive, so that the total effect is strange and weird.

The oriental influence in the art of the painter is seen in his "The Bronze Buddha." The background is apparently an Indian shawl, very bright and highly colored. In front of this is a white table, the bronze statue and a vase of flowers.

<sup>7</sup> In the Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.

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"The Lady of the Iris" is more Chinese in feeling (Fig. 82). The background is a golden yellow silk embroidery with a dainty little Chinese figure, whose black hair stands out in decorative patches. On a pink table cover are two bowls of purple and white irises. The success with which the painter has combined pink and yellow is striking.

That the painter could be delicate as well as bold is shown in "The Persian Jar." Here the background is of a light ivory color, with the slightest suggestion of a pattern. In front of this on a grey purplish white cloth, are four vases, one the deep blue Persian jar, one a Chinese vase, and two of iridescent glass. The whole picture is iridescent, like mother-of-pearl with its light-bright coloring.

The great value of an art like this is that it shows the possibility of independence with rationalism. The art of Henry Golden Dearth is deeply emotional, colorful and symbolic—in a sense it is exotic and weird, yet it is a true interpretation, which is intelligible to anyone. He himself did not believe that a man could create a new art by himself alone. He said that the art of those men who had created the works which he had loved most, was not the product of their individual interpretation of nature, but the result of a great movement.

That art will live which is the expression of a common impulse of humanity.

### EMIL CARLSEN

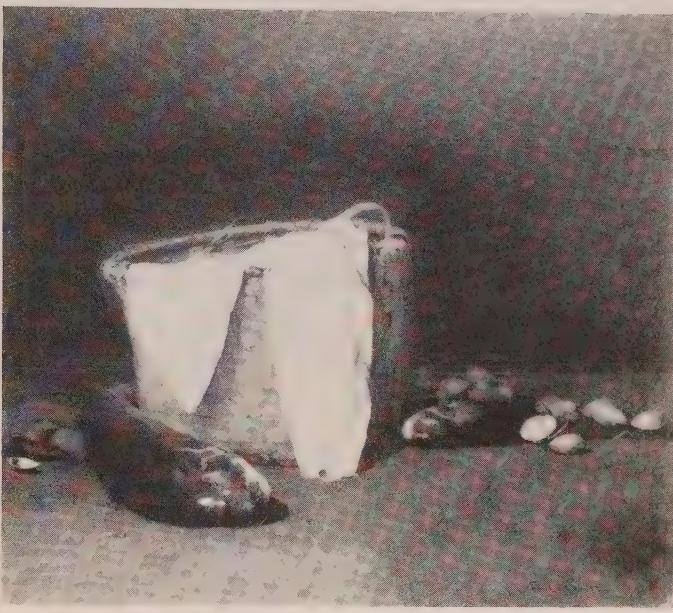
Emil Carlsen is unquestionably the most accomplished master of still-life painting in America today. It would be unwise to say he is the most highly gifted

master of the art in Europe and America, because it is impossible to judge in this way of one's contemporaries over so wide a field. But to one who has been interested in still-life painting for years, and observant of what is going on in the world, it is evident that Carlsen has lifted his art to a height it has never reached before. This is a strong statement, but it can be well supported. Doubtless many modernists will not agree to this, on the grounds that Carlsen's art is obviously based on the Dutch and on Chardin and therefore reflects the past, whereas a virile art, which seeks to be an expression of modern times, must discard past conventions and strike out on entirely new lines. There need be no quarrel with this opinion. The writer's attitude toward new movements in art is one of observant respect. The work done by Independents, especially in still-life, is interesting; whatever may be their permanent influence in figure painting, they have already opened up new fields in decoration.

But Carlsen is as modern—as independent as anybody. With old materials he has given a new interpretation to still-life—a more difficult and a more certain accomplishment than can result from experimenting with new theories, new processes.

We can apply to Carlsen our original tests for what good still-life painting ought to be. Is his art the expression of profound experiences, visions, emotions? Are his still-lives interpretations of these experiences? Do we, the beholders, share in the artist's experiences?

One cannot help but feel, after studying several examples of Carlsen's still-life that the painter experiences



EMIL CARLSEN, STILL-LIFE  
METROPOLITAN MUSEUM, NEW YORK



## AMERICAN STILL-LIFE PAINTING

in his work emotions of an aesthetic character more profound than those of any of the great masters of still-life painting, from Chase and Vollon, back through Chardin to the Dutchmen. Objects delighted the eyes of these men; their outward semblance, their form, their coloring, their textures, were possibilities for them as elements for design. But objects have a more mystical meaning to Carlsen; they delight his outward eye as they do any painter, but Carlsen has an inward eye, a faculty for discerning all that anyone else ever saw, but more—a rhythm and music and poetry, a serenity and dignity and sublimity which makes his still-life groupings classic. When gazing at a Carlsen still-life one falls into the same contemplative mood as one does before a Perugino—or sometimes one feels the mystery experienced before a Leonardo.

One wonders why—until one remembers that it is not necessarily the subject matter that contributes to one's mood. What leads one to contemplation before a Perugino is the abstractness of Perugino's viewpoint, which, by his own methods, he makes us share. These methods consist in broad over-arching skies, a very fine balance of forms and of spaces and immobility in his figures. What baffles one and urges one to psychologic speculation before a Leonardo is due to the attitude of profound study of human character on the part of the painter. The elusive shadows that play about the face and features of his figures pass on to us the mystery which even Leonardo could not solve. Carlsen's compositions have a spaciousness that make them seem always large. The objects are enveloped in a soft at-

mospheric light that subdues their outlines and half hides their shapes. As he shows them to us they are not literal *things*, dead, prosaic; they are not mere materials with which the artist has made a pleasing arrangement. They are forms which we cannot define; they elude us, mystify us, ensnare us; we forget what they are until finally we find ourselves detached from the actualities of life, off in a speculative dream world where we would like to stay. When we are rudely awakened and when we return to the world of sensibility, we vaguely realize that we have experienced a new sensation of beauty, and that forever after our standards will be different—our appreciation for beautiful things more keen, our sympathies wider and broader.

After all, what can art do for us more than this? Can a picture by Titian or Rembrandt or Watteau do more than awaken more fully our perceptions of beauty? What more can we ask of art? For with a passion for beauty, nay more, with an experience of it which has been real and memorable, we have been ennobled. From Plotinus to Croce, philosophers have taught that the experience of beauty is mystical, closely akin to religious. The deep significance of art to the higher life is too little understood.

In the Metropolitan Museum there is a still-life by Carlsen than which I know of nothing finer of its kind (Fig. 83). On the floor there is a large basket about which are lying fish and clam shells. Over the basket is thrown a white towel. This is all there is to it, but let us analyze it. The splendid spaciousness is what first impresses us. The basket is a large one, as we know



EMIL CARLSEN, STILL-LIFE  
WORCESTER ART MUSEUM



EMIL CARLSEN, STILL-LIFE  
COLLECTION OF MR. FREDERIC M. MC FADDEN, PHILADELPHIA



from the relative size of the fish and clam shells on the floor. And yet it takes up only a small part of the composition. There is no sense of crowding. The restraint of the composition—as in all of Carlsen's pictures—is one of its remarkable features. An envelope of atmosphere surrounds the objects and removes them from too harsh a scrutiny. They are not rudely thrust before us. The wall behind and the floor are bare. The interest thus centres about the basket, rough and broken, but with what care constructed! It is a basket, no hasty impression of one; one feels rather than sees that it is accurately woven. Notice how the fish are grouped. The large cod curves forward from the shadow of the background, solid and clearly defined; on the other side is a smaller cod. Only one or two clam shells stand out distinctly, the rest are massed in shadow. But the white cloth! There is only one other such cloth, and that is in the Chardin still-life in the Boston Museum. Teniers, likewise, threw his napkins into folds like that, but his were not so soft, so perfectly natural.

As for the fish, they should be compared to Chase's. Chase's fish, we said, were fishy—that is, they were wet and slimy and finny. These fish are also fishy enough, but Carlsen doesn't paint things for their surface value. How is it that he subdues their repugnant aspect—so that we do not shiver in front of them—we do not know, but Carlsen's fish we would like to stroke.

One could say much more about this picture—master-piece that it is, but one quality there is about it that stands out above every other. That is its inevitability. One realizes this only after seeing it many times; it

could not be otherwise. It grew that way and is immutable. Every form is rightly placed, every line is there for a purpose. Move a fish, a clam shell, and the picture is spoiled.

Recently, while visiting the painter in his studio, the writer was pleased to discover a little color print of a Vermeer. I do not recall what picture of Vermeer it was, but it reminded me of one in the Widener Collection in Philadelphia. The latter represented a lady holding a pair of scales in her hand. The scales were just evenly balanced. A movement of the arm would turn them. That represents Vermeer's art—perfect balance, hence perfect rest, perfect satisfaction. And this is Carlsen's art—perfect balance of form—perfect proportion—completeness. Do away with one element, and the composition is upset—spoiled. Herein consists the classicism of his art, for classic principles animate it, and the same aesthetic enjoyment is derived as from a work of the best period of Greek art.

One of the methods which Carlsen employs to give space and elusiveness to his pictures is the slurring of the line between the foreground and the back. The distant edge of the table, or the floor is lost. This is done by scattering little bits of straw or dead leaves, dried flowers, onions or vegetables where the line would be—just a few, just enough obscured in the shadow to make one wonder what is back there. Onions with their peely skins give this effect in his still-life in the Worcester Art Museum (Fig. 84). This is a picture quite unlike the one in New York, for Carlsen is versatile and fish is by no means his main interest. Here are copper pots and



DINES CARLSEN, THE SPANISH BRAZERO



earthen jugs, on a stone table. The whole is a study in rich coppers and ochres and greys, bathed in a quiet light that softens everything. Onions likewise appear in the still-life in the possession of Mr. Duncan Phillips. The main objects are an old copper pitcher, a dusty black bottle and a few bowls—the onions are scattered about.

One of his finest paintings is in the McFadden Collection in Philadelphia (Fig. 85). A dead hare lies on a table—or on the floor, you cannot tell which. In back of it are two large copper cans with lids and handles, and behind these again another dead hare. The background is dark, and scattered about in the shadow are a few pieces of straw and bits of leaves. The texture of the rabbit could not have been achieved better by Fyt, nor the surfaces of the kettles better by Vollon, but the wonderful charm of the whole composition with its perfect arrangement, soft lighting, restraint, has never been approached by any painter.

A few more pictures by Carlsen should be mentioned to show the variety of his interests. Several years ago he painted flowers. They are not his best works. In these he has not developed the individual treatment that he has in his other works. A more recent picture, in the possession of the Macbeth Galleries—January, 1919—sold to a western museum, shows a Japanese fan outspread against a wall, with a white bowl in front of it and a few dead flowers. Nothing could exceed the simplicity of the group, yet with these few objects the painter has achieved a decorative result not far removed in spirit from the Japanese. The subject calls for the most delicate, exquisite handling, which we find here. Yet with

all this conscientious respect for the design and textures of the fan and bowl there is that softening veil or film without which the picture would seem hard and literal.

Four or five of Carlsen's best still-lives are in the collection of Mr. Robert Hanley. One of these is called "The Madonna of the Magnolias," and shows a thirteenth century polychrome figure.

The use of old objects of art is exemplified in another still-life where the background is a mediaeval French tapestry, over which hangs a string of Chinese beads. In front is an ivory-colored vase with dead flowers (Frontispiece).

This short sketch of the still-life art of Emil Carlsen might be closed with a story which illustrates the power of Carlsen's work to compel appreciation and interest even in those hitherto indifferent to the charm of still-life painting.

One day one of the most prominent financiers of this country—a New York banker—came with his wife to Mr. Carlsen's studio to purchase a wedding present. His wife greatly admired a still-life on the easel—but the banker could see nothing in it—he did not understand still-lives. "But if you like it," he said to his wife, "take it home by all means." Accordingly the picture was purchased. Several weeks later the financier returned to the studio. "Do you know," he said to the painter, "we have kept your still-life, and I like it better than any other picture in my house. I want another." He now has three.

The work of Dines Carlsen is scarcely second to that of his father. A young man, not yet in his twenties, he



EMIL CARLSEN, STILL-LIFE



DINES CARLSEN, THE BRONZE BELL



## AMERICAN STILL-LIFE PAINTING

promises to develop a style which will do much to preserve the prestige of still-life painting in America. He enjoys of course the remarkable advantage of his father's direction, and as we would expect, his pictures and Emil Carlsen's are much alike. This similarity, if not identity of style enhances rather than decreases the value of Dines' pictures.

As his work develops, his still-life pictures will certainly not be better, for they appear already to be absolutely accomplished. But they will be different, and beyond a doubt more interesting on that account.

The attention of the public was first attracted to Dines Carlsen at the sale of the collection of William M. Chase when it was revealed that the great master of fish still-life had possessed a picture by the young painter.

For the past few years Dines Carlsen has exhibited in the National Academy of Design each year compositions of strikingly decorative character, well drawn and rich in coloring. Happily his output thus far is small, as he has wisely been restrained from the too hasty stereotyping of his style which would result from a large production.

Generally he chooses objects of rich design and color for his compositions. Great brazen bowls, Chinese or Delft vases and oriental objects of art have given him his opportunities for interesting contrasts. His last picture in the New York Academy Winter Exhibition called "The Spanish Brazero" (Fig. 86), showed a large brass bowl, and a Chinese blue vase with a few grapes. In the previous Spring Academy it was "The Bronze Bell" (Fig. 87), and in the 1917 Annual Exhibition

## POTS AND PANS

"The Delft Plate." The backgrounds always leave a vague suggestion of silken tapestry, the foregrounds are never insisted upon—one is scarcely aware of them; nearly always there are those happily scattered bits which Emil Carlsen employs to help the background melt into the shadow—sometimes nutshells, sometimes beads, and sometimes grapes.

One of his finest from the point of view of composition, is in the possession of the Milch Galleries. The principal object is a blue Chinese vase, on a teakwood stand. In front of this, to one side, is an ivory-white teapot with a lizard for a spout. On the other side of the vase is a small cup or bowl, and there are two pears on the table to add variety. It is one of those compositions so delicately balanced that not a change could be made without upsetting the equilibrium (Fig. 89).

## HUGH H. BRECKENRIDGE

Hugh H. Breckenridge, of Philadelphia, is a still-life painter with a very distinct modern style. He paints still-life objects for the emotions they arouse purely as arrangements of color, hence his pictures must be seen in the original to be appreciated.

The objects in his pictures are those which lend themselves to brilliant color arrangements. He combines Chinese jars, porcelain plates, vases of iridescent hues, bowls of fruit, strings of jewels, not for any association of ideas, but for their value in color design. Nearly always the backgrounds are curtains, rugs, or gorgeous materials which add to the wealth and display of color. Unlike Carlsen, Breckenridge is not interested in subtle-



DINES CARLSEN, STILL-LIFE



ties of form and of texture. His is not a fine craftsmanship closely akin to the arts and crafts of the middle ages. And, unlike Rittenberg, he pays little attention to qualities of tone and chiaroscuro. He does not remind one of Vollon or Fantin-Latour or the older masters. Undoubtedly he has been affected by the movement of which Cézanne was the inspiring source. But it would be misleading to compare him to that eccentric genius. Perhaps the closest analogy to his work would be that of Emile Blanche. Breckenridge's art is founded on drawing, and is accomplished and intelligible, beyond the experimental stage. It is an art that pays respect to the human understanding—the average man's idea of the appearance of things. Yet one feels when standing before a painting by Breckenridge that the artist's only thought is color.

His passion for voluptuous color often runs riot, but at other times it seems consciously restrained. An example of his best figure work is "The Nautilus." Exhibited in 1909 it shows a female figure in reverie, with delightfully modeled throat and shoulders, and bathed in brilliant light. The nautilus shell which she holds in her hand is carefully true to nature. In his landscapes he loves the same bright coloring. "Black-eyed Susans" is almost as much a flower study as a bit of countryside.

A good example of his still-life is "The White Vase" now owned by the San Francisco Art Museum. Here against a curtain background is, among other objects, a plate, a tray, a jewel box, and, most conspicuous of all, a tall ivory-toned vase; its form is both delicately and

firmly modeled; its outlines clear and regular. In spite of the painter's love for vigorous color and broadly-handled paint, it is evident he pauses caressingly over a surface that demands delicacy.

Breckenridge's arrangements are not always decorative from the standpoint of linear design. But there is little criticism to make in this respect of "The Chinese Jar" owned by Alexander Simpson, Esq., of Philadelphia (Fig. 90). Here, against an oriental rug, is placed a large, highly decorative jar, or pot, alongside this a tall candlestick with a fringed shade, and in front a porcelain bowl of apples, with other apples lying on the table. All these objects are broadly painted, the pigment being laid on thickly and freely, but the forms are carefully preserved and the textures of the different materials well presented. The grouping is less casual than in most of the artist's still-lives. The richness of the color, however, with its blue porcelain and golden fruit, is the picture's chief asset.

This is the art of a man, who, academically trained, is animated by modern impulses without forsaking the universal principles of art. And as such it is a reproof to the many eccentricities of the present day.

#### IV CONCLUSION

As long ago as 1875, or about then, Piloty said to Chase that the next great art movement would come from America. I am not aware that Piloty's prophetic insight was in other respects reliable, but there are signs that he was right about America's future in art. The



HUGH H. BRECKENRIDGE, THE CHINESE JAR  
COLLECTION OF ALEXANDER SIMPSON, ESQ., PHILADELPHIA



appreciation of still-life pictures is an indication of a highly cultivated artistic sense. When Emil Carlsen came to America no one would buy his still-lives. It is only recently that we in America have begun to appreciate them, and it is only a beginning. But now we have become so familiar with the still-lives of Chase, Dearth and Carlsen, Manet, Fantin and Cézanne, that this branch of painting is acquiring a prestige it never had before.

Today nearly every painter paints still-lives—not merely for training, but for exhibition and sale. It would be impossible to mention every artist who paints them, but when one recalls that Jonas Lie, Abbott Thayer, E. Irving Couse, Gari Melchers, Childe Hassam, Eugene Speicher, and Maurice Fromkes have all painted still-lives of distinction, one can form some idea of the growing appreciation of this branch of painting. While the names just mentioned are those of painters with a reputation in other lines of work, there are others who are rising to a prominent place in the world of art simply as still-life painters. A number of women painters, especially, are doing some extremely masterful work; among these are Clara T. McChesney, Dorothy Ochtman, Gladys Thayer, Elizabeth Spencer, Blanche Dillaye, Maude M. Mason and Dorothea Litzinger Thompson.

In the recent Academy exhibitions held in New York and Philadelphia the number of still-lives has been surprising. In the Annual Exhibition of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts of 1920, there were no less than thirty-four still-lives of which seventeen were arrange-

ments of flowers. Most of these were by painters apparently new to the field of still-life. Everett L. Bryant contributed five canvases, Lillian B. Meeser four, and others were by Edward J. Steichen, Arthur B. Carles, Helen Obertauffer and Emma Fordyce Macrae.

It is clear from an exhibition like this that still-life is becoming popular with the modern painter largely because it furnishes him with motives for decoration, and flowers seems to be the most adaptable to this purpose. As in the work of Everett L. Bryant, Lillian B. Meeser and Emma Fordyce Macrae, the design is treated as mosaic, brilliant, clever, emotional. Sometimes it is sparkling in effect, pointillistic, vibrant, scintillating like jewels, at other times it has a broader, more tapestry-like effect. One finds also the effect of mediaeval stained glass; it is then symbolic. Even cubistic design is found, as in the work of Steichen. Granted that flowers may serve no better purpose than to create subject matter for decorative design, appealing entirely to the eye on account of their wealth of color, then these painters use them successfully. But one misses in the exhibitions the deeper interpretation of still-life, the personal, the intimate, the profound comprehension of silent things.

It is significant, in this respect, that at the Philadelphia Academy exhibition, just referred to, there was but one still-life picture which the visitor involuntarily remembers, but one which he could not forget—the “K’ang hse’ and Quinces” of Dines Carlsen. And why? Its appeal was not merely to the outward eye. Although technically beyond criticism, and as decorative as any other picture, more obviously so, its distinction rested in

VIDE VIDÉ COLE CHASE, STUDIO LIFE



CHILDE HASSAM, THE EAST WINDOW





## AMERICAN STILL-LIFE PAINTING

those qualities which are elemental in a good still-life, the appreciation of the character of things, the expression of the mysterious emotions which things create.

Up until recent times the average American man (or woman) has had little chance to develop an appreciation for still-life; he has had little opportunity to study it; his awakening interest in art matters was concentrated on the more conspicuous types of painting—the anecdote, the historical episode, the portrait, the landscape; his historic prejudice was allowed to remain unchallenged. But now the challenge has been made; still-life pictures are making a demand that must be recognized. And it will be recognized, for the average man is, after all, covetous of what is worth having, and now that he is being made to see the beauty of a still-life, he will desire either to possess the thing itself—a still-life painting—or the love for one, which is more than the thing itself.



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